

Gladys Mitchell

Death of a Burrowing Mole



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Bradley 62



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Also by Gladys Mitchell

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HERE LIES GLORIA MUNDY • DEATH OF A BURROWING MOLE

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Two undergraduates decide to spend the long vacation searching for treasure which local legend indicates was buried in a castle well during the Civil War.

When the youths get to the site they are dismayed to find that other parties have also obtained permission to work there. Some archaeologists are hoping to excavate a Bronze Age barrow and two architects, with their helpers, intend to attempt a partial reconstruction of the walls and flanking-towers of the castle.

One of the archaeologists is also an amateur astronomer. One night, while studying the stars, he falls from the top of the keep... to his death.

The fall is regarded with suspicion when the police discover that all fingerprints have been cleaned off the dead man's telescope. Then two brutal murders are committed on the site and it falls to Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley and the local police to solve the mystery of the deaths.

The treasure? Well, the castle is easily identifiable, so no metal detectors please!



***To MILLICENT AND PATRICK
with the love and best wishes of their
eccentric aunt***

AUTHOR 'S NOTE

My warmest thanks to Sister Mary Martina McKeown, O.P., who sent me the newspaper cutting on which this story of buried treasure is based.

1

A Rumour of Buried Treasure

  Dear Godmother,' (wrote Bonamy Monkswood), 'thank you very much for my birthday cheque. As usual it will come in uncommon useful. I wonder, though, whether I've collared it under false pretences, as Tom Hassocks and I have changed our minds about going to Greece. Instead, we are planning to spend the whole of the summer vac hunting for buried treasure.

'What happened was this: towards the end of the term Tom was rooting about in a secondhand bookshop in search of material for his thesis on sheepfarming, when he came upon this folder containing half a dozen numbers of the county magazine. The copies were nice and clean and the folder, which was one of these clip-in affairs which are nearly as handy as having a bound volume, looked as good as new, so Tom thought that, when he had done with it, it would make a present for an uncle he is keeping in with, the old boy being a bit of an enthusiast for old customs and local legends and so forth, and the mags are crammed with such.

'Well, Tom thumbed them through and, although there was nothing much which would help his thesis along, there was this account of a ruined castle and its hidden treasure. I know these romantic stories are two a penny, but this particular one seemed more authentic and more likely than most.

'The castle, built by the Normans on a hill which had been an early Saxon stronghold abandoned after the end of

the Danish wars, was enlarged and altered during the Middle Ages and was held by the Royalists against Cromwell's troops during the Civil War.

'Well, the story told in the county magazine was that gold, silver and jewels had been collected from various Royalist sources and stored at the castle until they could be melted down or sold abroad to aid the Royalist cause.

'When the garrison realised that the castle could not withstand further siege, but would have to surrender in the end, the treasure was dropped into a castle well in the hope that it would be safe there until the king got on top (which, of course, he never did) and the treasure resurrected and used to carry on the war.

'When the castle was surrendered and evacuated, the Parliamentary army never found the stuff because, out of spite for having been kept at bay so long, they trained their artillery again on the empty buildings and reduced them more or less to rubble. The fallen masonry blocked the well so effectively that nobody knew where it had been and so the treasure, according to the account in the magazine, has never been found and must still be there. Apparently there is a cryptic reference to it in the county records.

'I'm not saying that I regard this as anything more than a fairy-tale; on the other hand, there may be something in it. Very few people inside the castle itself knew anything about the disposal of the treasure or even of its existence, and it is quite likely that those few who had been trusted with the secret were killed when the castle was taken.

'Tom has written to the owner of the estate on which the shell of the castle stands and has received permission to do a little restoration work. No mention of the treasure, of course, but I suppose that, if we *do* find anything, it will be crown property unless the coroner decides it belongs to the landowner. I am not up in these things, and anyway we have not found the stuff yet!'

‘And I shall be mighty surprised if they do,’ said Laura Gavin, when Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley, the godmother to whom the letter was addressed, gave it to her to read. ‘If Bonamy wants a fortune, he should join an American tennis circuit or rob a bank.’

‘He does not appear to be a fortune hunter, but I hope he will keep us in touch with his activities,’ said Dame Beatrice. ‘I can think of no pastime more enchanting than looking for buried treasure. I even envy beachcombers. Theirs must be the happiest of existences, don’t you think? Bonamy does not name the castle. I wonder which one it is?’

‘I know which one it is – at least, I think I do,’ said Laura. ‘From the clues he gives, it must be Castle Holdy. I remember taking Hamish there one afternoon when he was nine. He enjoyed scrambling about among the ruins and the lower part of a newel staircase in the keep is still there. He climbed up as far as it went and I exercised great self-restraint and forbore to warn him to be careful. The staircase ended rather abruptly and there was a sheer drop of thirty feet with a mass of broken masonry at the bottom.’

‘You did well to issue no warning, but I would not be surprised to hear that you stationed yourself on the fallen masonry to catch him if he overbalanced.’

‘I did, but I didn’t utter a word except to answer him when he emerged and called down to me, “Here I am.” I have a theory that it makes children unsure of themselves if you tell them to be careful. Of course, accidents do happen, but, in my opinion, a self-confident, self-reliant child is a safe child. Kids know pretty well what they can do and what they can’t do. The trouble comes when they’re given a “dare”. I brought Hamish up to say, “I’ll do it, if you’ll do it first.” I’m not at all sure that he took the advice, though.’

‘If you and Hamish were able to scramble about on the hill and climb the ruins, I take it that the castle is open to the public.’

‘You mean we might go along and take a look? Yes, the ruins are open to the public all right. What’s more, there is no charge for admission, so far as I remember.’

‘So we shall enrich our experience and save our pockets at one and the same time, and that constitutes a bonus so unusual that it would be a pity not to take advantage of it.’

‘When do we go?’

‘Well, the weather is clement, the school holiday season is not yet upon us and we have no outstanding commitments.’

‘If Castle Holdy is the one I think it is,’ said Laura, ‘there is a pleasant seaside town not so very far from it. We could lunch there and visit the ruins in the afternoon. The place is called Holdy Bay. It’s a quiet, modest little town and will remain peaceful until the school summer holidays begin, and those are still nearly three weeks off, I think. The town itself is more bracing than other places near by, because, owing to the irregularities of the coastline, it faces almost due east instead of south. It would do us no end of good to take the air there.’

‘It sounds delightful. It is a long time since I spent a day in an English watering-place.’

‘I hope it has remained as it was, that’s all. It’s years since I took the children there. Gavin looked after Eiladh on the beach while I took Hamish to Holdy Castle, I remember, but mostly we stayed on the sands.’

‘The university term still has a day or two to run, so the boys will not have begun their search yet. Let us go to Holdy Bay tomorrow, and survey the castle ruins at our leisure on the following day.’

Except for a housing estate on its outskirts and a caravan park on the seaward side of this estate, Holdy Bay had remained unspoilt. Its streets were narrow, its houses were old, and its two hotels were solid, unpretentious and comfortable. Laura booked two rooms for two nights at the

Seagull and after lunch she left Dame Beatrice at the hotel and went out to renew her memories of the town.

There was now a small yacht station in the arm between the old stone jetty and where the promenade ended, and at the landward end of the jetty there was a training school for deep-sea divers, but there were still the firm, flat sands, the bold headland to the south, the long, tapering peninsula to the north, and behind the promenade the grassy banks with park benches. There were no ugly shelters on the promenade, no beach huts, and the two hotels were back in the town.

She walked to the end of the jetty, to where the local pleasure steamer tied up during the holiday season, and then returned to the promenade, left it at the coastguard station and walked up the hill at that end of the town. At the top she took her binoculars out of their case and raked the landscape until she picked out the remains of the castle keep. As the crow flies, the castle was surprisingly close at hand.

On the following morning she and Dame Beatrice drove along winding roads to visit it. They were quickly out of the town and before they entered the next village the road appeared to double-back upon itself to curve round the foot of the hill which culminated at the high cliff Laura had seen from the promenade. Soon it crossed a bridge over a disused railway line and, a few miles further on, Laura stopped the car at a viewpoint from which there was a sight, in the far distance, of the castle. It was away to the left of the panorama which was spread out in front of and below the sightseer, for the road wound among low hills and was well above sea level.

An expanse of unbroken moorland was bordered by an even greater expanse of shimmering water. The lay-by into which Laura had driven the car was protected from a long drop to the moor by a stone wall. She got out to admire the view. Beyond the moors and the brackish tidal estuary

below her, she could see a town, but the chief point of interest was the castle keep. It stood out, a melancholy but dignified shell, on top of the hill she remembered from years back. She returned to the car and said, before she backed it carefully on to the narrow road, 'Hamish is going on for thirty now.'

'*Eheu! Fugaces labuntur anni,*' said Dame Beatrice. 'True, but how sad! One feels with the poet:

*'Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.'*

They drove on in silence. There were banks with their tall, summer grasses, birdsfoot trefoil, horse-shoe vetch, scabious, purple milk-vetch, ragged robin and ox-eye daisies, and on the hedges, which had been left untrimmed, there was wild clematis. Blackberry bushes were in flower and, at one place, there was a copse of hazels.

Laura pulled up again, got out of the car, jumped a ditch and returned with a spray of three hazel nuts in their green bracts accompanied by two heart-shaped, double-toothed leaves. She presented the spray to Dame Beatrice, who pinned it to the lapel of the summer jacket she was wearing and said, 'Three wishes!'

The narrow road made a last bend, went under instead of over the next railway bridge, and then it made a T-junction with the road which led one way to the village of Holdy and the other way further inland to the town Laura had seen from the viewpoint.

She followed the signpost to the village. A stream ran alongside the road and there was a small waterfall. The village, stone-built and unspoilt, offered a parking-space for the car and in the small square there was a tea-shop which Laura marked down for future reference. She locked the car and then she and Dame Beatrice followed the little stream round the foot of the castle mound, climbed the slope and picked their way through the arch of the castle

gatehouse, which was partially blocked with fallen masonry.

Beyond this there was an expanse of almost level ground. Then came the steepest part of the hill crowned by the remains of the keep. Dame Beatrice looked at the fallen blocks of stone.

'I am reminded,' she said, 'of a remark overheard by E. M. Delafield at Corfe Castle in Dorset and immortalised by her in *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*. A woman standing near the "Lady" said to her companion, "That bit looks as if it had fallen off somewhere." ' Laura surveyed the debris with an indulgent eye. 'There is enough work here to keep the young men out of mischief for weeks,' she said, 'never mind what's fallen off where.'

Shortly after returning home, Dame Beatrice received another letter from Bonamy:

'Dear Godmother,

'We have been outflanked! What do you think? Tom and I had hardly made our preliminary survey when two other interested parties turned up, although, thank goodness, they are not treasure-hunters like ourselves and neither will they be given any clue to our intentions.

'One party seems to consist of a man and four women. The plump woman is his wife, then there are a gorgeous one, a little, thin one and a six-footer – a most intimidating young female, from whom, I should think, John Betjeman drew his portrait of the Olympic Girl. She makes me feel like the 'unhealthy worm' he refers to as himself.

'The first hint we got that this gang were on the premises was when Tom spotted the caravan parked at the foot of the hill. The other party consists of two men and the first we knew of *them* was on our return from lunch at a pub-

cum-hotel in the village. A couple of workmen were putting up a notice outside the gatehouse which read: *Scientific work in progress. No admittance.*

‘Of course Tom asked what the hell and the men said they didn’t know. They were only carrying out orders. While we were arguing, the other parties turned up and warned us off. I took over from Tom, as there were ladies present and his language, even in these lax times, is apt to be unguarded, and pointed out that we had a vested interest and must be allowed admittance to the site. I informed them that we were undergraduates and that we had permission from the landowner to work on the ruins. I spoke of vacation commitments and a thesis we had to write. I spoke well and eloquently.

‘It turns out that the larger party want to make a survey of the site with a view to restoring the various parts of the castle – the flanking-towers, the postern gates and all that sort of thing – while the two men are planning to dig for evidence of a Saxon cemetery or a Danish tomb, or some such. They want to dig trenches and shift rubble and make sections and all those sort of Sir Mortimer Wheeler things which modern archaeologists do when digging up the past.

‘Well, thank goodness, we were all civilised enough to come to an understanding. The big party did not see that their work would interfere with that of the archaeologists, so that was all right, and Tom and I have offered assistance to both sides. In the end I think Tom and I may be the gainers, as it seems navvies have been hired to do some of the heavy work, so here’s hoping

that, among the lot of us, somebody uncovers our well!’

‘I wonder what effect, if any, the notice at the gatehouse will have on the general public,’ said Dame Beatrice.

‘My bet is that they’ll respect it,’ said Laura. ‘The sort of people who would go to look at a ruined castle would be law-abiding. Others will think it’s something to do with nuclear power and the atom bomb, or else that an oil-rig is going to be set up. Those are the things people connect with warning notices nowadays. They may stand and stare, but they won’t encroach. That’s my view.’

‘You appear to have your finger on the public pulse.’

‘I do better than that. I test its blood pressure,’ said Laura, ‘a thing the politicians seldom do.’

‘In any case, five able-bodied men and the Olympic Girl, plus a posse of strong-armed workmen, should be intimidating enough to keep even the most intrepid sightseer at bay,’ commented Dame Beatrice. ‘It occurs to me to wonder whether Bonamy and Tom have done wisely in offering their services to the others.’

‘I don’t see that they had much option. “If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em” is the only sensible motto in these unheroic times,’ said Laura.

There was a lengthy postscript to Bonamy’s letter:

‘In case you may know any of them, Edward and Lilian Saltergate are the married couple, both of them architects, and both have impressive letters after their names. His are B.Arch., A.R.I.B.A., and she is M.A. and F.S.A. The girls they have with them are Fiona Broadmayne (the large, hefty one) and Priscilla Yateley (the little, thin one). As for the third girl, the glorious Helen of Troy, to our horror she turns out to be a college lecturer and a Ph.D. Her name – just for the record, because it’s no use for anything else – is Dr Susannah Lochlure, and I can tell you the

“lure” is there all right. She is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, but also a Fellow of the Historical Association. “ ’Tis true ’tis pity, and pity ’tis, ’tis true.”

‘Tom had marked her down as his bit of crumpet while we are here, and says he is devastated now he knows that she ranks among the untouchables, but it doesn’t so far seem to have affected his appetite. She really is the most gorgeous bit of plum cake, though.

‘I don’t think Tom would have stood much chance with her, anyway, even were she less exalted than turns out to be the case. The two chaps who are proposing to dig up the landscape are a middle-aged man named Professor Veryan and a much younger fellow, a don at Veryan’s university, called Nicholas Tynant. He belongs to the elf-lock-over-the-forehead school of thought, looks shockingly like the portraits of Rupert Brooke, and is obviously keeping a proprietorial eye on the lovely Susannah.

As for the sweet girl undergraduates, they are both very definitely non-starters from Tom’s point of view. Priscilla shrinks and wilts if anybody so much as looks in her direction and is hardly what one would call an armful, anyway, and Fiona is utterly terrifying, apart from the fact that she quite obviously despises the male sex and is half a head taller than either of us, besides having a presence (to put it politely) which blots out the landscape.

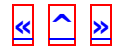
‘So what with Priscilla (I have a hunch she writes poetry!) almost swooning at the sight of us, Fiona utterly despising us, and Susannah, that glorious goddess, unaware, it seems, of our existence, we are dependent on the motherly

kindness of the plump, unruffled Mrs Saltergate. She and Saltergate talk of taking a holiday cottage in the village instead of staying for two months in their hotel. If that comes off, we may be able to wheedle her into getting our bibs and tuckers washed for us, otherwise we shall have to use the launderette in the nearest town, and that costs money.

‘On the surface, everybody seems to conform to one known type or another, so I do not think any one of them would be worthy of your scalpel. Meanwhile Tom and I are confident that, between Saltergate’s reconstructions and Veryan’s excavations, our well will get itself expertly uncovered and then our real fun will begin. We were somewhat taken aback at first when we found there were to be all these cuckoos in our nest, but now, although I think both parties will work Tom and me until our sweat bedews the hillside – Veryan has already laid off two of the four workmen he had hired to do the digging – our gains will more than off-set our losses. Perhaps you will pop along and watch us at work some time? It will be a scene to strike pity and terror into the human heart.’

2

Castle in the Sand



From the keep there were views of the sea. To the north-east were the shallow waters of the wide estuary beyond which Laura had seen the castle. To the south-west was the open sea in the direction of Holdy Bay, although the town itself was tucked away behind its hills.

Between the castle and these two wastes of water were the moors. The village at the foot of the castle hill had begun as a collection of huts for the Saxons who had toiled to build the Norman castle. It now lived by tourism. There were no farms in the immediate neighbourhood, for there was neither agricultural land nor pasture. In fact, it was difficult to understand why the village had survived into the twentieth century to enjoy the benefits of the tourist trade and the invasion and almost total takeover by retired people of rather more than average means.

Malpas Veryan and his companion, Nicholas Tynant, had taken rooms in the slightly larger of the two hotels, and Edward and Lilian Saltergate had booked in at the other. Both parties were old acquaintances and, although they could hardly be called close friends, a mild tolerance existed between them, although they were not attached to the same university. Dr Susannah Lochlure had joined the staff at Edward Saltergate's college and the two girls mentioned in Bonamy's letter to his godmother were nominally in her charge and shared a hired caravan with her for what was anticipated to be the time which would be spent on the work on the castle ruins.

On this first full morning at Holdy, however, nobody felt any inclination to begin labouring on the hill, so, having fraternised over dinner at Veryan's hotel on the previous evening, the whole company, including Bonamy and Tom, was now a few miles from the castle at a quiet strip of the coast about halfway between Holdy village and the town of Holdy Bay.

Malpas Veryan, a long, lean man with a talent for complete relaxation when he was not feverishly working, was sprawled on the cliff-top, his eyes closed against the almost intolerable blue of the sky. Beside him sat Nicholas Tynant, a more compact, athletic figure, pipe between his teeth and his arms round his knees while he watched the scene below him. Edward Saltergate, squatting on the firm sand, was using a bit of pointed stick to mark out a plan of what he thought Holdy Castle would have looked like before Cromwell's artillery got at it, and the four women and the two young men, Bonamy and Tom, were disporting themselves in the ocean.

There were sea-pinks, the hardy tufts of thrift, in the little hollows and on the ledges of the cliff. On the cliff-top where the two dons were taking their ease, the short but untrimmed grass was scented with thyme. Occasionally Nicholas looked down at the painstaking cartographer below him, but for the most part he watched his Aphrodite as she challenged the waves.

Now and again a seagull flew past, but all the wading-birds, the ringed plovers, dunlin, sandpipers and sanderlings, had disappeared from the flat, wet shore, frightened away first by the bathers as these ran across the sands and into the sea, and then too deeply suspicious of the crouching figure of Edward to return for the molluscs, the small Crustacea, the marine worms and the rest of their natural food.

After a lapse of time which had been registered by nobody, Edward straightened himself and walked slowly

round his sand-map. Then he walked to the edge of the water and called out to the bathers that he was ready.

Malpas Veryan sat up, Nicholas Tynant put his long-cold pipe in his pocket, and then both men got to their feet and, by means of a flight of wooden steps, descended the cliffs. In the sea, Susannah, with a flash of white arms, sculled shorewards on an incoming wave and the others soon joined her on the beach, splashing through the last of the ripples as the long, lazy, incoming tide followed them on to the sand as though reluctant to let them go.

The bathers picked up towels and began drying their hair and their arms as they followed one another up the beach, an incongruous quartet of women and two golden-armed Iollans, the graceful, straight-limbed youths.

*'The Spartans, on the sea-wet rocks,
Sat down and combed their hair.'*

said Veryan.

' "I saw a frieze on whitest marble drawn," ' said Nicholas, looking at the white limbs of his so-far unattainable beloved. The swimmers formed themselves into a semicircle around the sand-map. They continued rubbing their hair and arms, but the actions were automatic. Their interest was in what lay at their feet. Edward Saltergate expounded. He still held the sharpened stick with which he had been working and he used it now as a pointer.

'Of course, this rough plan is on the flat,' he said. 'You may find it rather different when you tackle the real thing on the slopes of the hill. Here at the top is the keep. There is still quite a lot of it standing, as you saw yesterday afternoon. At the foot of my sketch-plan are the remains of the outer gatehouse, still rather impressive, and the remains of the walls of the outer bailey lie between these two buildings and enclose a large space of a very unusual shape.'

‘In my survey last week, I made out the remains of the flanking-towers in this outer wall. I think there would have been ten of them altogether, and I do hope that we shall locate them all. The most important (and enough of it remains for identification) is this one at the end of the middle bailey. It would have been circular and, except for its entrance, enclosed. The other towers were semicircular and were merely lookouts and defence posts to prevent enemies from climbing over the walls.

‘There may have been a postern gate between the keep and the nearest lookout tower, but now there is nothing but a gap in the wall. On the opposite side there are some remains which may have been the old hall before a larger castle hall was built in the small enclosed inner bailey which also contains the keep.

‘There is a long, deep ditch, still plainly to be seen, between the outer bailey and the middle bailey, and we may be able to find the remains of the secondary gatehouse which would have been approached by a drawbridge, for the ditch acted as a dry moat. There would have been no direct access to the inner bailey from this direction. The entry from the middle bailey would have been round to the side in accordance with the strategy of the times, which tried to ensure that an attacker had to walk as far as possible and under constant threat from the besieged garrison before he was able to attempt to storm the last entrance to the castle. Any questions?’

‘No,’ said Vryan, ‘but your ditch is interesting.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Tom Hassocks. ‘What about the water supply?’

‘That’s a good question,’ said Edward. ‘In a place of this size, there would have been two, or possibly three, wells. A small stream runs past the foot of the hill, and there must be a spring or springs somewhere on the hillside as well. The builders of the Middle Ages were more knowledgeable about feats of engineering than is sometimes thought. They

understood the use of water-towers and they knew how to pipe water from the source of supply up to their buildings. They used oak, elm and often lead for their pipes and my secondary interest is to see whether we can locate any of these underground conduits. They still should be in existence.'

'Two or three wells, I think you said, sir,' said Bonamy.

'Choked with rubble by now, I fear, Mr Monkswood. One of our tasks will be to locate and partly clear them. Are you volunteering for what may prove to be a thankless task?'

'You mean we are unlikely to locate them, sir?'

'Oh, I have every hope of *finding* them. One was probably in the outer bailey near what I think was another postern gate guarded by its flanking-tower, and there was probably another in the keep itself, where there is a good chance that we shall locate it when we have cleared the interior of the building. Clearing the wells themselves will be a different and more difficult matter.'

'Would there still be water in the wells?' asked Tom.

'I don't see why not. Anyway, I have made a large plan in Indian ink of the site, and Dr Lochlure has said she is prepared to pin it up in her caravan in case anybody wishes to consult it, as the next tide will wash away this ephemeral picture we have here.'

'Do you want us any longer, Edward?' asked his wife, as he paused.

'No, Lilian. There is only one more thing. My concern is with the castle buildings, or what remains of them. The interior of the large outer bailey, which, as we have seen, is the flat expanse between the slope which leads up from the main gatehouse to the defensive ditch, is the province of Professor Veryan and we shall not encroach upon it. Away with you, then. Get some lunch and then everybody should be at the foot of the castle mound by half-past two.'

The group broke up and dispersed. As they walked back to where the party had left their cars, Tom said to Bonamy,

'I'll tell you what. Let's scour the neighbourhood for a pub outside the village. Veryan and the other overlords will make for the Barbican. We've got until two-thirty, so there's plenty of time for a reconnaissance.'

There had been a discussion between the two young men concerning cars. Bonamy had suggested that they rely only on his, for Tom had been staying with him the night before the two of them were due to begin the survey of the castle, but Tom dismissed the idea. If the group was to include girls, a party of four in one car might be all right on some occasions, but there would be other occasions when, as he expressed it, a man could work better on his own. There were more important things in life, he pointed out, than sharing the price of a few gallons of petrol, and one of these was that a man must have scope if he wanted to get action.

The girls, except for Susannah, however, had proved something of a disappointment, and Susannah was as tantalisingly beyond reach as the grapes were to the fox, so the young men had no option but to resign themselves and endeavour to imitate the fox's bitter attempt at self-consolation by surmising that the grapes were sour.

'She's probably frigid,' said Tom. 'These brainy, beautiful women often are. She must be nearly thirty, anyway. Well, now,' he went on, 'our problem, as I see it, is to keep all knowledge of our private activities from the others until we have something to report. It's a nuisance having the girls' caravan parked right at the foot of the hill. They will want to know what we're up to.'

'There isn't anywhere else near at hand where they can possibly leave it. We'll have to put our cars there, too. I wonder the gypsies haven't taken over that verge before this. It's wide and it's flat and it's grassy,' said Bonamy.

'Well, let's hope the girls are heavy sleepers.'

'I wouldn't put it past that young Priscilla to rise before dawn and gather a nosegay while the dew is still on it. She

looks a chronic Gawdelpus to me. I suspect her of being a secret folk-dancer and Fiona is probably an early-morning jogger.'

'Well, so long as she jogs away from our mound and not up it, that won't affect us. What about Susannah? I don't see her as part of the dawn chorus.'

'Well, it seems as though she will stick to the caravan, anyway. Perhaps she thinks the girls need a chaperone with types like us about.'

'That blest pair of sirens wouldn't need a chaperone even if you set them down with Brigham Young in Salt Lake City. Never mind the girls. Let us thank goodness for the sybaritic tendencies of the Senior Common Room. At least we shan't have Veryan, Tynant and the Saltergates breathing down our necks at crack of dawn.'

'True, but I'm not too happy about young Priscilla. The trouble with girls who don't have a sex life to contend with is that they need an outlet in other directions. Priscilla has all the earmarks of perpetual spinsterhood. That being so, her nose will always be into other people's business and that's the last thing we want. I have a hunch that she doesn't lack brains, either.'

'I wouldn't worry about Priscilla. If she did get up early, she wouldn't trouble about what we were up to. She would probably be saying her prayers to the sun or meditating on mutability. She's the Yoga type. Any danger, as I see it, would come from Fiona. She is, I suspect, beetle-brained, and probably full of innocent, childish curiosity.'

'If anybody does notice us, let's hope they will put our activities down to excess of zeal. What about the evenings? I should think we could knock off at five or half-past. We could get dinner at the Barbican at six-thirty, and that would give us a nice bit of time before dark to push on with our search.'

'Perish such an unworthy idea! No, Tommy lad, I'll get up with the lark, but by the time we've done our personal

and private stint before breakfast and then put in a nine to one and then a two-thirty to (probably) five-thirty labourer's day on Saltergate's account, I shall be ready for beer, skittles and bed.'

'Perhaps you're right. No sense in running ourselves into the ground.'

'Besides, I expect Fiona has brought her guitar and will sit on the steps of the caravan after dinner and sing plaintive love songs in a throaty contralto which will start all the village dogs howling. We shall be much better off in a pub. Come on! I've got the thirst of Tantalus upon me after all that salt-water bathing.'

'There is one more thing. I don't see why we need to pitch a tent down there by our cars and the caravan. If we're planning to start work before breakfast, what's wrong with carting the folding camp-beds and our sleeping-bags up to the keep and camping out there so long as the weather keeps fine? We shan't need a roof over our heads unless it rains and there is plenty of shelter from the wind up there. What do you say?'

'Pub first, plans later.'

They drove inland and found a hostelry in a small inland village called Stint Magna where the moors ended and a river wound through water meadows. They drank their beer and bought sandwiches at the bar and, fortified, returned to Holdy. Finding themselves first in the field (for service at the Barbican for Veryan and Tynant, and at the Horse and Cart, where the Saltergates were staying, was willing but slow), Tom and Bonamy transferred camp-beds and sleeping-bags from their cars up to the keep and cleared one side of it of rubble.

'Young Monkswood is the godson of Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley, he tells me,' said Lilian Saltergate to her husband, as they walked from the Horse and Cart alongside the little river which curved round the foot of the castle mound. 'I hope that it means he is going to take his

work here seriously. The other young man, Mr Hassocks, strikes me as a somewhat frivolous individual.'

'I am not sure that Dame Beatrice herself has not a frivolous side to her nature,' said Edward. 'I remember offering her a cocktail on one occasion and she was guilty of responding with what I imagine is a rather well-worn pun.'

'Oh? What did she say?'

'She quoted from the Rubaiyat.'

'A cocktail, you say? Oh, well, there are certainly lines there which would be apposite. Which did she choose?'

*'Oh, thou who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the road I was to wander in.'*

'How naughty of her! Poor Edward Fitzgerald never dreamed of such levity. Did she accept your offer of a cocktail after all that?'

'No. She said she preferred dry sherry.'

'If we co-opt those two lads to help with the digging,' said Malpas Veryan, 'I think we ought to stake them to daily breakfast and dinner with us. Lunch they can get for themselves. The Saltergates and Dr Lochlure are making similar arrangements for the two women students. The idea emanates, of course, from the motherly Lilian. A kind and thoughtful woman, that, and practical, withal. She spoke to Saltergate and asked him to speak to me.'

'About giving the lads breakfast and dinner?'

'She only mentioned that they were providing for the caravanners. She spoke about toilet facilities for the two boys.'

'Oh, I expect they will dig a trench in some convenient spot. The Scouts do it when they camp, I believe.'

'There will be quite enough trenches on the hillside when we begin our work, without one which has a purpose of its own. Besides, there is the question of baths. This is going to be dirty work and sweated (literally) labour. I thought that, if we fixed up a regular breakfast and dinner

routine for the two lads, the landlord would not be averse to their using the facilities at the hotel.'

'There is a public convenience in the village square.'

'But no facilities for washing, let alone baths. The girls will be all right. Their caravan is well equipped, but Lilian Saltergate was concerned for the two youths, so I felt I had to reassure her.'

'Very well. Mind you, I expect young fellows like Tom and Bonamy eat like horses and will order two of everything.'

'I would not be surprised if we found you yourself ordering two of everything when you have spent a week or so on that hill.'

Edward mustered his forces.

'This afternoon,' he said, 'we shall walk round the site and then I shall assign specific tasks for tomorrow. I must stress that it is important we keep clear of the work Professor Veryan will be doing. Nominally, Tom and Bonamy are attached to that party, but theirs is to be a divided allegiance. After all, they came here to survey the castle on their own account, so we must be grateful for any assistance they are willing to give. Well, now, when we have finished our survey, which should take about an hour, the rest of the afternoon is free. We begin work in earnest tomorrow, but it is necessary for us first to relate what we have seen on the plan to what we shall now see on the ground.'

'Which is most of the castle,' said Fiona, looking disparagingly at a large block of Purbeck stone which was near where she was standing. She turned to Priscilla. 'What shall we do when we've finished walking round these ruins?' she asked almost in a whisper. They loitered a little as their seniors moved off, and held a short colloquy. Then they tailed in behind the rest of their party.

Meanwhile Malpas and Nicholas appeared to be doing nothing but converse while they looked at the broad, oddly

shaped expanse of the outer bailey. Then, as Edward's party approached a kind of slag-heap which had once been the castle stables, Veryan went over to Bonamy and drew him out of Edward's circle. At this, Fiona took the opportunity of taking his place beside Tom, halting him for a moment or two while the others, following Edward, made their way towards the gatehouse.

'Look here,' she said, 'you two don't need both your cars while you're here, do you?'

'Probably not.'

'I'd like to hire the rather smaller one.'

'Hire it? Well, it's mine, but why?'

'If our labours end each day at a reasonable hour, Priscilla and I could do with some form of transport. The evenings are long, the caravan is boring and we've got money to burn now that the Saltergates are paying for our meals and Dr Lochlure is shouldering the cost of the caravan. I'm taking an advanced School of Motoring course and have a clean licence, so how's about it? We'll be immensely chuffed if you agree.'

'Tynant and I,' said Professor Veryan to Bonamy, 'would like to make ourselves responsible for you two fellows while you're working with us.'

'Thank you very much, sir, but we have reached years of discretion and are entitled to vote and to leave home without our parents' consent.'

'Of course. I meant responsible so far as providing you with your breakfasts and dinners at the Barbican. It's the least we can do in exchange for your help.'

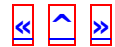
'It's very kind indeed of you and Mr Tynant to bother about us,' said Bonamy.

'Not at all. As I always say, the labourer is worthy of his hire. Oh, I've had a word with Saltergate. At least, it originated with him because of the women. The weather is unusually hot and the work is trying, not only because of the manual labour involved, but because of the dust we

shall be stirring up. I don't know whether you two got my message, but we shall all be knocking off at each midday. No work will be done after lunch, so every afternoon is free.'

3

Donkey-Work



What do you think of Dr Lochlure?’ asked Priscilla, as they were enjoying the afternoon respite from labour.

‘Think of Susannah? How do you mean?’ asked Fiona.

‘Do you call her Susannah to her face?’

‘That, or Su. Only in private, of course.’

‘Do you have a *schmaltz* thing about her?’

‘Good Lord, no. What do you think of her yourself?’

‘She is very beautiful. I have had to choose between adoring her for her beauty and envying her its effect on other people. I have selected adoration. I believe in sublimating my emotions. Why do you think she invited the two of us to accompany her on this jaunt?’

‘Me for my muscles – from what we have seen today I should say we are in for heavy work on that castle mound – you for your brains and enthusiasm, and both of us because we are not potential rivals of hers where men are concerned.’

‘Is that why you bother with me? I have often wondered about it.’

‘Bother with you? Wonder about what?’

‘Wonder about our friendship. We must appear an unlikely couple to other people.’

‘Who cares about other people?’

‘I’m afraid I do. They must wonder what you see in me.’

‘I see somebody who helps me with my essays and who stands on the touchline at home matches and roots for our

side, that's all.'

'Reverting to Dr Lochlure, have you noticed Tom Hassocks? He has eyes for nobody else.'

'He doesn't stand an earthly. Nicholas Tynant is her man for all seasons.'

'So much so that perhaps it is as well she has not put up at his hotel.'

'I'll tell you something else about Tom Hassocks,' said Fiona. 'He and young Monkswood—'

'Are not here in the interests of pure scholarship? I couldn't agree more. They have some secret ploy in mind, otherwise surely they would have camped out at the foot of the hill near their cars and our caravan, where it's grassy and pleasant. Instead of that, they have dragged camp-beds and sleeping-bags up to the keep.'

'Tom has locked the boot of his car, too.'

'How do you know that?'

'I tried it, thinking there might be a couple of cans of beer I could manage to sink without trace. I would have paid him for them, of course.' She was sunbathing. She turned on to her back and pulled a towel over her face.

'What a blessedly quiet spot this is!' said Priscilla.

'It won't remain so, once the school holidays begin.'

Priscilla agreed. Then she said, 'If you like me, I wonder you never came for a holiday with me before this. I've often wished you and I could hire a horse-drawn caravan and lead a gypsy life for a week or two.'

'It would bore me to death. Besides, there would be the horse to look after and feed, and the ever-present problem of finding somewhere to pull in for the night. Oh, no! Give me rock-climbing in the Cuillins!'

'You must have a good head for heights.'

'I've never thought about it.'

'That's the whole point, I suppose. Anybody who did not have a good head for heights would *have* to think about it.'

'Oh, nonsense. They wouldn't do it, that's all. One soon learns one's limitations.'

'I climbed the stair in the keep, but my head swam. Fiona, exactly *why* did you accept Dr Lochlure's invitation to come here?'

'The sixty-thousand-dollar question! I don't know. I'm already bored with the scenery and bored with the people. Oh, well, at least we've got the car now.'

The reason for Fiona's having been able to test the lock on the boot of Tom's car was that she had persuaded him to agree to her proposal. Once the young men had surveyed the young women and had decided that amorous dalliance was what Tom described as a non-starter, the possible advantage of having two cars at their disposal had disappeared, so when, earlier that afternoon, Fiona had approached him with her offer, he had accepted it.

'I suppose you've got a driving licence?' said Priscilla.

'Of course. I'm a very experienced driver. If there is an accident, it certainly won't be caused by me.'

'How I envy you your self-confidence!'

'You envy me my self-confidence, but you don't envy Susannah her beauty. I don't, either. Being large and unbeautiful keeps one out of a lot of trouble.'

'I also envy you your rude health and your physical fitness. I was always a sickly child.'

'You have compensations. I wish I could write good essays and make up poetry. Will you get a First, do you think?'

'Oh, yes. Examinations hold no terrors for me, not even the *vivas*.'

'Well, *there's* self-confidence for you! And you envy me mine!' Fiona ran seawards, laughing, a Scandinavian giantess from Jotunheim, a veritable Hyrrokin, her hair streaming in the wind. Priscilla sat clasping her knees, her thin shirt flattened against her undeveloped breasts by the same seawind as was tossing Fiona's hair. She thought of

Susannah in the arms of Nicholas Tynant, and the first line of a sonnet came into her mind. 'Put out the light and be my body's balm.' She fumbled in the large basket she used as a handbag, took out notebook and pencil and unclipped the sunglasses she had fastened on to her powerful spectacles.

Before her the sun gleamed on the wet, pale sands against which the few scattered pebbles looked black; behind her rose limestone cliffs, and to her left a long, flat rock of the same stone ran out into the sea and would be covered at high tide. A gull, with wings incredibly white against the blue of the sky, hovered for a moment and squawked an insult to the poet before it soared and flew off. Priscilla, completely absorbed, saw and heard nothing. She wrote, frowned, crossed out, rewrote, and only looked up when Fiona put a sea-wet hand on the back of her neck and said it was time to think about tea.

'Yes, all right,' said Priscilla. 'I think I've got the octet, so I can let the sestet wait. I'll just make a fair copy of what I've done, if you'll leave me alone for five minutes.'

'Something for the college magazine?'

'No, it's going to be too good for that. I don't want it printed until I really publish.'

'God bless the work,' said Fiona. 'You are a genius.'

'I bet you someone else will find our well before we do. I think we're on to a mug's game,' said Tom, straightening his back.

'It doesn't matter who finds a well, so long as we know where it is. The only concern of the others will be to locate it and clear it down to five or six feet and then put a grating over it. They won't attempt to do any more excavating than that. Why should they?'

'How deep were these castle wells?'

'Goodness knows!'

'They could go down a couple of hundred feet, I suppose,' said Tom gloomily. 'I'm beginning to wonder

whether the story about the treasure is true. I mean, even supposing the stuff *was* chucked down a well to stop the enemy from getting hold of it, how were the owners – and how are we – going to get it up again?’

‘First find your well and then I’ll lower you down in a bucket. Banish these morbid thoughts. The lark’s on the wing, the hillside’s dew-pearled.’

‘That bird up there isn’t a lark; it’s a kestrel. It probably nests in the keep. They like old buildings if they can’t find a rocky cliff.’

‘Oh, well, so long as it isn’t a magpie, we’re all right. Magpies are the birds which bring bad luck.’

‘One magpie wouldn’t matter. It’s two or four together you have to beware of, according to our cook, who comes from Northumberland. You know, I don’t see why we should have been fobbed off with clearing up this gatehouse. All the outer walling on the east side as far up as the ditch has disappeared. The stone has been carted off by the locals, I suppose. Once Veryan and Tynant begin their digging, we shall be much better off working with them than with Saltergate. Besides, they are paying for our meals; he isn’t.’

‘True enough. There’s another thing: when Veryan begins the actual trenching, he won’t go anywhere near where the old stable block used to be.’

‘How do you make that out?’

‘It’s simple. If there really is an Anglo-Saxon cemetery under the outer bailey, the builders of the castle would never have dug a well where there were corpses.’

‘Oh, well, we shall see. One thing: at the rate Veryan and Tynant are taking their measurements and plotting out where to begin the dig, somebody may have found all the wells before they and we and the workmen have to put our backs into the spade-work. Let’s hope it will be easier than humping these blocks of stone.’

Malpas Veryan joined them. He was accompanied by two burly fellows in jeans, shirts and unzipped, grubby

windcheaters.

‘Our fellow labourers,’ he said. ‘They will be helping to clear the outer bailey and we shall begin digging in a day or two, when we’ve got the circle of the cairn mapped out and the site free of stone and rubble. This is Bill Stickle and this is Gideon Stour. Gentlemen, Mr Monkswood and Mr Hassocks, who will be helping us to excavate the last resting-place of a prehistoric chieftain.’

‘I do fondly hope as he won’t haunt us,’ said Bill Stickle, with a laugh in which Gideon Stour joined.

‘I thought we were going to dig up an Anglo-Saxon burial ground,’ said Bonamy in a murmur to Tom. ‘You can’t call the Anglo-Saxons prehistoric. What exactly shall we be looking for, sir?’ he asked in his ordinary voice.

‘Bronze Age burials. Did I hear you murmur something about the Anglo-Saxons? Undoubtedly they had a settlement in these parts, but we are after something which is of the greatest interest to Tynant and myself. We hold somewhat differing theories about Neolithic and Bronze Age burials and this excavation may go some way in proving which of us is right.’

‘So what *are* we looking for, sir?’

‘Basically, a central grave, but multiple interments are not unknown. Sometimes members of a family were buried in the same mound. The principal grave will no doubt be easy enough to locate, for it will be in the centre of the circle we are measuring out. The other interments may be almost anywhere within the same circle. Our guide is the enormous ditch which is so obvious a feature of Saltergate’s defence system. I am certain it represents a segment of a circle and that is our clue, for it must have been part of a henge.’

‘It sounds splendid fun, sir.’

‘I think so. Now I don’t want you fellows breaking your backs lugging Saltergate’s blocks of stone about. You ease yourselves in gently until you get used to the job. In any

case, these two splendid fellows will help both parties, I am sure, if Saltergate needs a little assistance occasionally.'

'You be our employer, sir, not t'other gentleman,' said the older workman firmly but civilly. His companion was more forthright.

'We be hired to dig, not to tote blocks o' stone about,' he said.

'Oh, dear! These union rules!' said Veryan lightly.

'Would you be wanting us further?' asked the older man.

'No, no. There is nothing to do until the marking-out is all done. That is why I thought you might care to help Mr Saltergate a little.'

They made no reply except to touch their foreheads and slouch off.

'Not exactly chaps I would choose to go with on a walking-tour,' said Tom, 'if you don't mind my saying so, sir.'

'Oh, I do so heartily agree, but, having made their point, they will now help Saltergate if and when he needs assistance,' said Veryan.

'How soon will you be going to commence digging, sir?' asked Tom.

'Oh, probably tomorrow. That's why we don't want you to wear yourselves out dealing with blocks of stone. I wonder what made you think of Saxon cemeteries?'

'Something Mr Saltergate said, I think.'

'Oh, well, his interest is in buildings and his conception of history begins with Edward the Confessor,' said Veryan, laughing. 'No, no. Tynant and I will be looking for signs of a disc barrow.'

'But the area you are to cover is pretty flat for that, isn't it, sir?' said Bonamy.

'Tynant's theory - and here he is in agreement with Saltergate - is that the earliest castle on this hill was a motte and bailey and constructed of wood. The stone buildings came later. The wooden keep was where the

remains of the later one still stand, and Saltergate thinks that the outer bailey was flattened when the second castle was built. That meant the domestic quarters could be erected on level ground at the foot of the sharp rise which leads up to the keep. The earliest castle would probably have had only a palisade around the living-quarters. In time of trouble all the inhabitants would have crowded into the keep, the drawbridge over the defensive ditch would have been raised and on the slope up to the keep there might have been a broad ladder from which a section could be removed to make an assault on the keep more difficult. But this is childish stuff compared with our excavations.'

'Are we likely to find skeletons or anything else interesting, sir? What exactly do we expect?'

'At some sites archaeologists have found two types of funeral procedure, inhumations and cremations. First, whether it was one or the other, came, as I told you, the main burial, usually the deepest down, then followed what have been termed satellite burials, sometimes on a level with the primary interment, sometimes rather higher up in the mound, and, later still, secondary burials have turned up, but, as those were higher up still, we may not find any traces of them on this site. Any bones might have been dug up and thrown away when the Normans flattened the site to make their outer bailey, but we hope not.'

'Would there be any good finds in the primary grave, sir, apart from skeletons or cremated dust, I mean?' asked Tom.

'It depends upon what you mean by "good finds", Mr Hassocks. Anything we shall find is certain to have been duplicated elsewhere - a bronze dagger, a beaker, perhaps an archer's wrist-guard, possibly (although this is fairly rare) some magic symbol such as the head of a hawk which was found in the barrow at Kellythorpe.'

'Couldn't the hawk's head have been, like the dagger, the beaker and the wrist-guard, something simply to help

the chap with his hunting when he reached the next world, sir? Why was it thought it had to do with magic?’

‘Grahame Clark argues that, if the intention was simply to provide an aid to future hunting, the entire body of the bird would have been there and not merely its head.’

‘Strange how this theory of a life after death dates back far, far earlier than so-called Christian times,’ said Bonamy.

‘You would think that the lives lived by Bronze Age people were so nasty and brutish that they certainly wouldn’t want to have another bucketful of existence, no matter what form it took,’ said Tom. ‘From these grave-trappings it seems they didn’t think it would be any different from life here on earth. Could they really have wanted a second innings?’

‘Their lives were not only nasty and brutish, Mr Hassocks. They were also (to complete your quotation) short. It is doubtful whether many of them extended to more than between forty and fifty years.’

‘Oh, well, after the age of fifty I suppose most of us will be living on borrowed time,’ said Bonamy. To cover up what he saw immediately as a somewhat tactless remark to a man who must have been very near, if not beyond, his fiftieth year, he added hastily, ‘I except my godmother, of course, but, then, I really believe that she is indestructible.’

‘I sincerely hope that you are right,’ said Veryan. He nodded amiably and left them to their labours. They worked on their clearance of the gatehouse for a bit and then, easing off, Bonamy said, ‘I see that Saltergate has joined Fiona in the keep and turfed Susannah out to join Mrs Saltergate and Priscilla on the perimeter to do the lighter work. You know, Tom, from what we know now, it looks to me as though the vested interests may clash – Veryan and Saltergate, I mean.’

‘Why should they? Everybody has been warned by Saltergate that none of the activities is to interfere with Veryan’s dig.’

‘Only because he thinks, as we did, that the dig will be confined to the middle of the outer bailey. What if this earthwork, of which the ditch forms part, went out to where the flanking-towers and all the rest of that wall used to be?’

‘That isn’t our problem. Come on, let’s buckle to and show willing. If only my parents could see me now, they would be proud to have bred such thews and sinews!’

They heaved and sweated. Although, considering the bombardment it must have suffered, a surprising amount of the gatehouse was still standing, there was giant’s work to be done in removing the chunks of stone which blocked the entrance and in clearing up the rubble and small packing-stones which had helped to bind the larger blocks together.

‘Well, if this is your idea of a good way to spend the long vac,’ said Bonamy, when they knocked off for lunch, ‘what’s the matter with Dartmoor?’

‘Don’t weaken. Any day and at any time, somebody will find traces of a well and then we’re home and dry.’

‘*You* won’t be, when I’ve lowered you into the slimy depths in a bucket. Don’t go putting your hand into any holes, nooks or crevices on the way down. Remember *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas*.’

‘Who was he?’

‘Ignorance is bliss when it comes to the stories told by M. R. James. I *suppose* they’re fiction, but they carry such a stamp of authenticity that I’m never quite sure. Thomas was Abbot of Steinfeld and he is supposed to have buried some gold treasure in a well and, I suppose, put a curse on it.’

‘So what happened? I suppose somebody found out about the treasure and went to look for it and ran into trouble.’

‘You shall read all about it. The thing is that treasure buried in wells may be better left alone. I am not as anxious as I was to locate this well of yours.’

‘What has changed your mind? I thought you were as keen on the scheme as I am. Don’t tell me that a story by an ex-Provost of Eton College has affected you to this extent? What brought Abbot Thomas to your mind?’

‘I was pulling your leg about the story, brilliant and frightening (like most of his) though it is. What I don’t much like is this double-talk from Veryan. I *know* he told us we were to excavate a small Saxon burial ground. Now it turns out that we are to dig up what may be the remains of a Bronze Age chief.’

‘So what? You don’t think Veryan is a treasure-hunter like us?’

‘I don’t know. What I like least of all is the treble deal the owner of the estate has made with us, with Saltergate and with Veryan. At some point the various interests are bound to clash and then there is going to be trouble.’

‘Not necessarily. We’re all civilised people. I don’t think there is any chance that the fur will fly. All I care about is our well and, so far as that is concerned, it doesn’t matter who finds it so long as it’s located and nobody finds out why we’re so keen on it.’

‘Isn’t it going to attract attention when it’s seen that we are deepening it beyond what Saltergate thinks is necessary for his reconstruction?’

‘Remember the immortal advice, “Sit still and let Time pass”. In other words, some situations never arise, so be patient.’

Lights were on in the caravan when the two young men turned in on the following evening. The weather looked settled, the day had been hot and, although no work had been done in the afternoon, the two were aware of muscles which were responding adversely to unaccustomed manual labour. At dawn Tom woke Bonamy and they went outside for a breath or two of the fresh morning air before they returned to the keep to search for signs of a well.

They themselves had cleared enough space to be able to put up the camp-beds, but Saltergate and Fiona had made a complete clearance and that morning it became obvious that the water-supply to the garrison was not inside the keep itself, although it was probably not far away.

In one angle of the walls, which were sixteen feet thick (as a splayed tiny window indicated), there was the archway to the newel stair. They had climbed the stair in turn and more than once since their arrival, deeming the top of the keep an advantageous place from which to get a complete picture of the site.

Tom again climbed the winding, narrow, stone newel to the parapet. Below him, on the side nearest the hall, was the heap of stone and rubble which had been cleared out of the keep. To his jaundiced eye it looked mountainous.

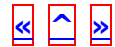
‘So what did Sister Anne see?’ asked Bonamy, when Tom came down again.

‘Sister Anne saw the result of a lot of misplaced effort on the part of other members of the party. Do you know what?’ said Tom disgustedly. ‘I bet there were outbuildings to the keep and they joined it to the hall. They’ve gone now and, in the space, Saltergate and Fiona have dumped a mountain of stone and rubble. Suppose they’ve covered up one of the wells? It will take us *days* to clear it again.’

‘We had better not touch it at present, or somebody will wonder why, and that’s the last thing we want. We can’t afford to have people smelling rats and asking all sorts of awkward questions. Let it ride for the present and don’t worry.’

4

Little Rifts Within the Lute



I don't really think we need worry,' said Bonamy again the next morning. 'If it had been the two girls it would be a different matter, but Saltergate is an expert and dead keen on this clearance and restoration thing. He wouldn't have missed out on anything as important as a well. There can't have been any traces of one inside or outside the keep. We'll have a good look at the interior of the hall before anybody begins work on it. Remember that Saltergate told us he was interested in tracing waterpipes from the source of supply up to the living-quarters? There really can't be a well under all that rubble they threw out. He would be sure to have spotted it.'

'I blame the landowner,' said Saltergate to his wife, as they prepared to go down to breakfast at the Horse and Cart. 'That's the worst of these upstart landlords. Old Lord Ambrose would never have given permission for three sets of people, all with different objectives, to work on this one small site. I wrote to this new man as soon as I realised that we were not to have the castle to ourselves, but, so far, have received no reply, and that is uncivil, to say the least.'

'It would be far worse if we all had the same objective,' said Lilian pacifically. 'As it is, our interests do not clash with those of the others. Surely that is something to be thankful for?'

'It might be, if Veryan and Tynant were not cutting so wide a circle. By the look of things, they have marked out

their ground so that they are bound to encroach, sooner or later, on my territory.'

'Well, they certainly seem to be allowing themselves plenty of scope. We had no idea that their outer ring would be so wide. Anyway, we have lots of clearing up to do before we need make an issue of it. Indeed, I hope to goodness it will not reach that stage. Could you not have a word in Nicholas Tynant's ear? He is far less intransigent than Veryan.'

'I think he is very much the junior partner in their enterprise.'

'All the same, he may be able to persuade Veryan to leave their outer trench a little bit incomplete so as to allow the foundations of our flanking-towers to remain undisturbed.'

'He is a fanatic. Such people - well, one cannot argue with them. If the foundations of even one of my flanking-towers are dug up and destroyed, my whole project is spoilt. I think I will approach Tynant, as you suggest, and if nothing comes of that - and I'm sure nothing will - I may go up in person to the house and put my case in as forceful a way as I can to the owner.'

'You will probably be able to speak to nobody but the bailiff. The family are sure to be away at this time of year. In their absence I doubt whether anybody will be prepared to alter arrangements already made. I think you will have to trust to the goodwill of Malpas and Nicholas and so try to avoid unpleasantness.'

'If any goodwill existed, it vanished as soon as they found that I had an option on the site. I wonder what chance there is of my finding out which of us was first in the field? A prior claim ought to carry considerable weight.'

'It might be better not to attempt to establish one. You might find that Veryan's agreement was signed prior to yours.'

‘Yes, that is an embarrassing possibility, I suppose. Anyway, I will adopt your suggestion and begin by having a quiet word with Nicholas.’

‘Oh, Lord!’ said Tynant. ‘Well, I appreciate the position, of course, but Malpas and I have a point of view, too, you know. I am sure we would be only too happy to do as you wish, but, if we fail to complete our ditch so as to spare your foundations, the chances are that we should miss finding one of our secondary burials or (even worse) lose one of the satellite interments and that would spoil the whole dig.’

‘I am not so ill-informed about pre-history as Veryan may think. I have seen Paul Ashbee’s book and it seems to me that all which remains for you to find is the primary grave. All traces of burials higher up in the mound which would have covered the barrow must have been dug up and destroyed long ago, when the cairn, I feel sure, was levelled to make the outer bailey.’

‘On the other hand, you have no actual proof that the ground ever was artificially levelled. If ours was a bermed barrow, whether a disc barrow or a saucer barrow, particularly the latter, there would be very little of the actual burial mound to be seen, so that very little levelling of the ground would have been necessary.’

Malpas Veryan came up to them. He smiled.

‘To employ the opening gambit favoured by the police force, “What’s all this, then?” ’ he said genially.

Nicholas and Edward both began to speak. Nicholas gave way to the older man, so Edward said, ‘I have taken great care to tell my people to respect your dig, Malpas, and on no account to trespass on your territory, but if your trench is carried to what appears to be its logical conclusion, it seems to me that you and Nicholas will encroach quite disastrously on mine. Do you really intend to undermine the foundations of at least one of my flanking-towers? Do you really need quite so much room?’

‘Well,’ said Malpas, maintaining his easy tone, ‘at present it is hardly possible to tell, because these Bronze Age barrows varied so much in size. Owing to your Norman castle-builders and their determination to make a large jousting-yard or whatever they intended, the outer surface indications of my barrow have been lost. The thing could have been as wide in diameter as a hundred and twenty feet or as narrow as thirty feet across. In the ordinary way we should have something to guide us, but here we are at a singular disadvantage except for the very useful guideline of your defensive ditch. I am convinced that the ditch once formed part of my henge.’

‘I am left wondering what makes you think there was ever a barrow here at all. It seems to be merely guesswork on your part.’

‘Not at all. There has been a reconnaissance from the air. Your defensive ditch forms the arc of a circle, the old name for the village here was Yarlbury and the presence of barrows on neighbouring hillsides suggests the distinct possibility that there could have been one here. The sighting from the air was pretty positive. Where one finds water, such as the little river which winds round this hillside, one expects to find an early settlement and where there were settlers there were graves. It’s as simple as that.’

‘Maybe, but that does not entitle you to encroach on my flanking-towers.’

‘Oh, my dear fellow,’ said Malpas, still smiling but with an edge to his voice, ‘you mustn’t be greedy! According to that plan which you drew so expertly on the damp sand, you expect to uncover the foundations of at least ten of the things. Surely to lose one of them is no great matter.’

‘It matters to me. You might as well say that the loss of one plate out of a priceless dinner-service is no great matter, but I don’t think the owner would agree with you, any more than a person who had an unique set of chessmen

would think that a missing or replaced and inferior pawn did not matter.'

'It's like this, you see, Edward,' said Nicholas, 'I agree with you that the primary grave is the one we are almost bound to find. It will be in the middle of our circle and too deep down to have been disturbed, we hope, but we don't want to miss a secondary interment or a satellite grave, either of which will be nearer the surface than the primary burial. I can't believe that one flanking tower (which, in any case, will only be a duplicate of all the others) can be regarded as of greater importance than secondary and satellite graves which will certainly *not* be duplicates of the primary burial.'

'You are entitled to your opinion,' said Edward, in a tone which belied these words, 'but the loss of the foundations of even one flanking-tower would make every difference to my work on the site. If you insist upon completing the trench you have marked out with your pegs, my reconstruction of the fortifications will be ruined. After all, you have no proof that there were any secondary graves, whereas I know the layout of my flanking-towers exactly. We must go to arbitration, I suppose.'

'And who is to arbitrate?' asked Malpas.

'The owner of the property or his secretary or bailiff. They will be able to tell us which of us has the prior claim to the site.'

'Whose letter got there first, you mean?' said Nicholas. 'That seems reasonable. What do you say, Veryan?'

'That my work is of greater importance than his. Finding out whose letter got to the landowner first is not going to solve any problems,' replied Veryan, turning away.

'Look,' said Tynant, before he followed his leader, 'I'll try to persuade him to leave undermining your walls until the very last. If we find secondary burials during the earlier part of our dig, it may not be necessary to touch your foundations at all. How would that be?'

‘Thanks, but you won’t be able to persuade him to delay any part of his work if he doesn’t want to.’

‘Then I’ll get Susannah to have a try. It would be difficult for any man to refuse her anything, and I know he finds her very charming.’

Dinner at both hotels that evening was an unusually dull meal, Veryan appeared to be brooding, the two boys were tired and Tynant found it hard work to promote any conversation at all. At the Horse and Cart the usually mild Saltergate was sufficiently incensed by Veryan’s intransigent attitude to discuss it bitterly with his wife in front of the two girls and Susannah. Susannah, who had a foot in both camps, was silent for almost the whole of the meal and as soon as it was over she collected the two young women and the three went straight back to their caravan.

A little later Bonamy and Tom left the Barbican and went in Bonamy’s car to the pub they had discovered in Stint Magna. Fiona heard the car drive off and said she wished she were going with them.

‘I thought you despised their company,’ said Priscilla.

‘It would be better than that of the Saltergates tonight. What a dismal dinner! There has been a row. That was obvious. Even Susannah could not cope.’

‘Everybody was tired, that’s all,’ said Susannah, ‘and when people are tired they magnify trifles.’

‘I heard what Edward Saltergate was saying to Lilian,’ said Fiona. ‘He was hot under the collar and no mistake about it. No name was mentioned, but he was talking about Professor Veryan. I’m sure of it.’

‘There was bound to be trouble sooner or later, I suppose,’ said Priscilla. ‘There has been a clash of personalities. I imagine Professor Veryan will win. He is the stronger character.’

‘I am going out for a walk,’ said Susannah abruptly. ‘It is much too early to go to bed.’

‘She won’t be walking alone, that’s for sure,’ said Priscilla, when the door of the caravan had closed. ‘She has a date with Nicholas Tynant. I thought you might be tactless enough to offer to go with her.’

‘Not I. I’m aching with fatigue. All that navvying is no joke when it goes on day after day. I shall cry off soon and go and spend a weekend with my family. Oh, no, I can’t. They will be away. I shall cry off, all the same. I’m not only tired; I’m still most terribly bored.’

‘I wish I knew why Bonamy and Tom are here. I’m sure they’re not really interested in either architecture or archaeology.’

‘No, and they don’t seem to have picked up any girls,’ said Fiona, ‘so that’s not why they are staying.’

‘They take that car out every evening, you know,’ said Priscilla.

‘Only to do a pub crawl, I expect. Let’s play Beat Jack Out of Doors for fivepenny pieces, or shall we go up to the keep while the boys aren’t there and make them apple-pie beds?’

‘I thought you were tired.’

‘I am. All right, then, let’s hit the hay.’

‘Well, dinner proved us to be four strong, silent men,’ said Bonamy.

‘Funeral bakemeats was more like it,’ said Tom.

‘Something has happened. Something has fouled up the works. I wonder whether Susannah is at the bottom of it?’

‘How your mind does run on that pulchritudinous wench!’

‘Veryan has got his beady eye on her, and Nick Tynant knows it. That’s my reading of the situation. They didn’t say a word to one another at dinner.’

‘But Veryan is married, isn’t he?’

‘What’s that got to do with it? Probably divorced, like everybody else nowadays. I’ll tell you what, though. I shall

put in a few more days of this sweated labour and then I'm going on strike for the weekend.'

'During which time one of the others will find our well.'

'It will still be there when I come back.'

Tom's impression that Veryan also was attracted to Susannah was underlined by Priscilla. She voiced her sentiments as the two girls got ready for bed.

'Would you call Professor Veryan a lecherous old man?' she asked.

'*Ni l'un, ni l'autre,*' Fiona replied.

'What do you mean by that?'

'Not old, not lecherous.'

'He must be fifty.'

'You can't call that old.'

'I've seen him look at Susannah.'

'She is well worth looking at. She ought to be painted or sculpted or something, before she begins to get a middle-age spread.'

'I finished my sonnet.'

'Any good?'

'Probably not. I always think I'm better than Shakespeare when I first finish a poem, but the feeling wears off later.'

'I should think that's a very hopeful sign.'

'Which half of it?'

'Oh, all of it; first that you think you're good, and then that you realise you aren't.'

'But I *am* good,' said Priscilla, piqued. 'Of course I'm good. I'm not as good as I'd like to be, that's all, but it will come in time. I know it.'

'If Professor Veryan ever did contemplate a pass at Susannah, I wonder how she would take it?' said Fiona, reverting to the more interesting subject of conversation. 'He is more eminent than Nicholas and I believe he has money.'

'I wonder how long Susannah intends to stay out tonight? I hate the door not to be locked when I'm in bed.'

' "And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted", ' said Fiona sardonically. 'Don't worry. It won't happen to the likes of us. Lock the door, though, if you feel nervous. I'll let her in when she comes back. I'm going to relax but I'm not sleepy.'

'Oh, I don't really mind about the door, so long as I'm not alone in the caravan. You are a tower of strength.'

'I feel like one when I'm heaving stone blocks and shovelling rubble. I think we shall all need a break very soon. I intend to take one anyway, whether the Saltergates like it or not.'

'It does seem as though the best thing to do, after all, is to find out whether the others or you have priority,' said Lilian Saltergate that night.

'Malpas is against such a course. He thinks it would solve nothing.'

'The other thing would be to take a vote.'

'Susannah is attached to our party, but she would vote with Nicholas and for Malpas.'

'The two boys would vote with us, surely?'

'Most unlikely, if Susannah voted with the other side. They admire her very much. Besides, Veryan feeds them and you know what is said about the way to a man's heart.'

'What are the chances of Malpas picking up a germ of some kind and having to retire from the scene? You could manage Nicholas if Malpas were not there.' Lilian laughed as she said this.

'It is so unreasonable of Malpas,' said Edward, 'If he knew - if he were *certain* - I might feel better about it, but he has no proof whatever that anybody is buried under one of my fortifications. He is prepared to sacrifice my definite, actual reconstruction for some purely experimental fiddle-faddle of his own. I've got to do something to stop him. The question is - what *can* I do?'

‘We could always throw all our stones and dust into his precious trench, I suppose.’

‘You take the matter lightly.’

‘No, indeed I do not. I wonder whether we could make a bargain with him?’

‘Of what kind?’

‘That we will raise no objection to any damage he does, provided that he and Nicholas and their workmen will promise to make it good afterwards.’

‘Well, he should be willing to give an undertaking of that sort, but I am not willing to ask for it. I have as much right here as he has.’

‘Sometimes it is unwise to insist too strongly on one’s rights. That attitude can provoke a war.’

‘A war can have a righteous cause. Anyhow, before I try anything else, I am going up to the house. I shall say nothing about priorities or rights. I shall simply tell the owner or his representative what Veryan proposes to do, and I shall ask whether they are prepared to allow him to undermine and damage a historic monument. That ought to be enough for an injunction, I think.’

‘I wish Malpas would tumble into his beastly trench and do himself an injury,’ said Mrs Saltergate. ‘I hate him for upsetting you like this.’

Meanwhile Bonamy and Tom had become acquainted with two girls who were staying at the pub in Stint Magna.

‘Now that we’ve found corn in Egypt,’ said Tom, ‘I am a good deal less keen than I was on sweating away on that job at Holdy Castle. The story about the treasure is probably a myth, anyway – something for the local yokels to speculate upon when the telly goes wrong on some dark winter evening. Let’s pack the job in and disport ourselves with Virginia and Sarah. What a real bit of goose that they should be staying at a pub where the beer is excellent and our welcome assured by such a pleasant landlord as Sam.’

‘It’s going to be a bit sticky telling Saltergate we’re packing the job in. He’s got nobody else except his wife and the wenches to help him,’ said Bonamy.

‘I thought he was co-opting Veryan’s two workmen.’

‘There’s a fuss-up going on between the parties. I fancy all good feeling has died the death. Anyhow, we can’t opt out straightaway. Give it another week or so. We only work in the mornings, anyway, and Virginia and Sarah need that time for their holiday reading. They’re going to be third years and say they’ve got a lot of leeway to make up. Everybody slacks off in their second year and those two have had to listen to some more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger remarks from their tutor. We’ve got every afternoon and evening free to sport with Amaryllis. Be content with that. We’d have to buy them a proper lunch each day if we had them all day long, and think of the price of petrol! As it is, we buy them a drink and a packet of crisps and lie out on Sam’s back lawn resting from our labours all afternoon and then take them out to tea.’

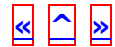
‘Where they shovel away enough jam and cream to—’

‘Never mind to what. Chivalry deplores these excessive comparisons. We stick to Saltergate, then, with an occasional switch to Veryan when he needs a hand, but only for the next fortnight. After that, we’ll see what the options are. Right? Agreed?’

‘Just as you say. Lord, though! How I do ache!’

5

Attempts to Get Arbitration



Do I go with you?' asked Lilian, at the end of lunch at the Horse and Cart next day.

'I think,' replied Edward, pushing back his empty cup and saucer and wondering, as usual, why he ever drank what the hotel called coffee, 'that perhaps one voice may be more effective than two, so I will go alone.'

'I wonder whether Malpas also has the intention of visiting the manor house?'

'Oh, now it has come to words between us, I have no doubt that Nicholas will persuade him to do so. That is why I am anxious to get my say in first.'

He and his wife went up to their room and he changed his clothes before going downstairs to the reception desk to ask for the best route by car to Holdy manor house.

The route was short, not more than seven miles, but pleasant. Hill folded into hill, one green, one wooded, another covered in bracken and heather, and the narrow road wound among them through the valleys until it reached wide-open iron gates whose stone gateposts were surmounted by flower-sculptured urns. There was a lodge just inside the gateway and Edward pulled up, but nobody came out, so he concluded that the lodge was untenanted and drove on.

A long lane, bordered by rhododendrons past their time of flowering, later passed beside deciduous woods, heavy, dark and still, for there was no wind and, but for the shade of the trees, the heat would have been that of a desert.

Edward encountered the full glare of the sun again when, having come out on to a broad expanse of open parkland, he drove up to the mansion, pulled up and got out of the car.

A very large man wearing a green baize apron answered the door. Before Edward could speak he said, 'Family ain't at home. Servants be on board wages. There's only me and the bailiff.'

'It is the bailiff I wish to see. I have business with him. Will you take him my card?'

He was admitted to a handsome Georgian entrance hall from which a straight staircase with wrought-iron banisters led up to a broad landing supported on classical columns in the Corinthian style. The floor of the hall was of black and white large tiles, and the general impression was of spacious elegance.

The manservant disappeared along a corridor which opened off the right-hand side of the hall and Edward spent the ten minutes he was kept waiting in looking, without much pleasure or interest, at what appeared to be ancestral portraits on the walls.

The servant did not reappear, but from the corridor came a florid man with a petulant mouth and hooded eyes. Differently dressed, he might have sat for one of the portraits at which Edward had been looking. The likeness was explained, perhaps, when he spoke.

'Mr Saltergate? I am Mr Mathew's cousin. I am sorry to have kept you waiting, but I spent a moment of time in looking up your letters.'

'My last one received no answer.'

'I should have acknowledged it, of course, but I put off a reply in the hope that my cousin would have answered my own letter on the subject. I'm standing in for him while he is away. Do come along and take a glass of something, won't you? Wrong time of day, I know, for alcohol, but perhaps something long and cool—?'

He led the way and they went into a white-painted room with a plain ceiling and a modernised fireplace. From the circular table in the centre of the room and the straight-backed but upholstered chairs against the wall, Edward took it that he was in the dining-room. There was no sideboard, but a small occasional table stood against the wall at one side of the fireplace. On the opposite side was the only armchair in the room. The owner's cousin drew it forward, indicated to Edward that he should seat himself and then added, 'Shan't be a minute. Can't rely on Wicklow to fix a decent drink. Now,' he went on when, having returned with two tall glasses, he had pulled forward a chair for himself, 'what can I do for you? My name is Sandgate, by the way. Sandgate and Saltergate, eh? We should get on well together. You health!'

'I will come to the point,' said Edward. 'I wrote, some months ago, as you know, to ask permission to attempt some reconstruction work at Holdy Castle. I was granted that permission, but, now that I have begun work, I find that other parties have been granted equal facilities.'

'But not, I understand, to carry out the same kind of work.'

'That is a fair observation, but my difficulty is that I am now faced with a case of encroachment. May I explain?' He took out a scribbling pad from the briefcase he had brought with him and made rapid sketches with a BB pencil, explaining as he went along. 'Here is the keep - no problem there - and here is the hall next to it. We shall get them both cleared of rubble and, later on, we hope to repair the top of the keep sufficiently to render it safe. It is secure enough in itself, but the parapet is so much broken away as to leave only a few inches of walling at one place. We can collect enough broken stone to build it up.'

'And you have my cousin's permission to do this, I know. I have not visited the ruins myself. So what exactly is your problem?'

‘This,’ said Edward, sketching in his flanking-towers. ‘The other party has permission for an archaeological dig. It is being carried out scientifically and is based, I understand, on a survey previously made from the air as well as on another from the ground. Unfortunately, if Professor Veryan is permitted to carry out his ideas, this is what will happen.’ He traced out a broad circle which cut into the sketch-plan of the walls and towers. ‘You see what I mean.’

‘Yes, indeed. Most unfortunate, but what can I do about it? There are letters from Professor Veryan, too. He has equal rights with yourself. I don’t see anything for it, Mr Saltergate, but for the two of you to come to some amicable agreement between yourselves. My position here is merely that of a bailiff. I can’t alter decisions made and permissions given by the owner of the property.’

‘There must surely be a question of priorities. Didn’t my application arrive before that of Professor Veryan?’

‘Even if it did, he has an established right to work on the site, just as you have. My cousin also filed a letter from someone who signs himself T. V. M. Hassocks and the filed copy of my cousin’s reply gives this person permission to attempt to locate the castle wells. What interest he can have in them I do not know, but there it is. My cousin seems to have strewn permissions all over the place.’

Profoundly dissatisfied, Edward drove back to the Horse and Cart to seek what consolation he could obtain from Lilian and he was even less pleased when, just beyond the manor house gates, he passed Veryan’s car with Tynant seated beside the owner-driver.

‘Professor Veryan?’ said Sandgate. ‘I am delighted to make your acquaintance. I have just had a visit from a Mr Saltergate, whom I believe you know.’

‘Yes, indeed. I thought he might have been here. I passed his car on the road. Not to beat about the bush, I

have reason to think that my visit may not be unrelated to his.'

'Come and sit down and let us talk things over. He left some sketch-plans with me.'

'Of his flanking-towers, no doubt.'

'His? I was under the impression that, if they belong to anybody, it is to my cousin, the owner of the Holdy estate.'

'Of course, of course. I meant only to refer to the work he intends to carry out.'

'And I meant only a rather clumsy pleasantry. Mr Saltergate was not very coherent. This is the sketch-plan he left with me. Perhaps you can explain it better than he did.'

'Oh, well,' said Veryan, taking a chair and picking up the sheet which Saltergate, at leaving, had torn off his scribbling pad, 'it is simple enough and is what I hope to talk to you about.'

'Before you begin, I had better repeat what my position is here. I am nothing more than a caretaker. Portia (if I remember my schoolmasters and their attempts to get me to read Shakespeare and, what was worse, to get some of him by heart) could not alter a decree established. I find myself in exactly the same circumstances. I have been through all the relevant correspondence very carefully and it seems to me that my cousin has granted you and Mr Saltergate equal rights. There is also another candidate in the field, someone called Hassocks.'

'Oh, he can be ignored. He and his companion are undergraduates with a thesis to write. They are glad to learn from Saltergate and myself, and have put themselves at our disposal. They are charming boys and will be a great help when it comes to all that digging.'

'Digging? Digging for what?'

'Obviously Saltergate did not explain very clearly what our object is. We certainly are not digging for gold or diamonds, although young Hassocks may have some such idea. We are excavating a Bronze Age burial ground.'

Unfortunately the trench – here it is on Saltergate’s plan – is likely to touch (no more than touch) the foundations of one, or, at the most, two of the flanking-towers. This sketch he has left with you exaggerates the scope of my dig.’

‘He seemed greatly concerned.’

‘A bit of a dog in the manger, I am afraid. I cannot allow him to override me. I am engaged upon an important piece of archaeological research which I hope to record, along with other such projects, in a book which I have in preparation. I cannot allow my work to be truncated because of some fantastic objections on his part.’

‘I see the difficulty, yes, but I don’t see how I can help either of you. I will get in touch with my cousin, if you like, and find out whether he has anything to suggest. It does seem to me, though, that you are in a stronger position than Mr Saltergate is. You are in a position to undermine his work; he can hardly retaliate by damaging yours.’

‘Well, I don’t know so much,’ said Malpas, knitting his brows and then giving a rueful smile. ‘He has a determined wife and four feckless undergraduates on his side. I would trust Saltergate himself not to step outside the bounds of fair play and civilised behaviour, but I would hesitate to go bail for the others.’

‘*Four* undergraduates, Professor?’

‘Certainly. There are the two boys, Hassocks and Monkswood, and Saltergate has brought along two girls. There is also the woman lecturer from the girls’ college, but, of course, I am sure *she* would never join in any mischief.’

‘But what mischief could the others do?’

‘They could rough up my excavation and, in doing so, destroy all sorts of most valuable evidence.’

‘But you don’t believe Mr Saltergate would be a party to anything of that sort?’

‘No, I don’t, but he is in a very angry mood and I think this might inflame the others in his party, particularly his

wife.'

'Well, I can only suggest you keep an eye on them, Professor. Meanwhile I will get in touch with my cousin. Is it possible for me to come along at some time and see how the work is progressing?'

'Oh, by all means. I shall be delighted to take you round and explain what we are doing.'

'Well,' said Veryan, joining Tynant in the car, 'he says there is nothing he can do.'

'What did you ask him to do? After all, to be perfectly fair, we are more of a menace to Saltergate's towers and walls than ever he is to our excavation. Couldn't we—'

'No, we couldn't. My work is all-important. His is mere play by comparison. If my trench impinges upon his walls, well, that is just too bad, but it cannot be helped, and I shall have to tell him so.'

'What kind of fellow is this bailiff?'

'He is a cousin of the owner and, I should guess, a poor relation at that. The servants are all on board wages except (he told me) one gamekeeper who has had to remain at work because of the young pheasants, and—'

'I thought a big chap in a green baize apron let you in. That wasn't this cousin, was it?'

'No. That's a manservant called Wicklow. The other reason I have for thinking that the cousin is a poor relation is not his clothes, threadbare though his jacket was. Half the population goes about looking like tramps and nobody thinks anything of it nowadays—'

'I thought that was only the young. How old is this fellow?'

'Forty, perhaps. Anyhow, what struck me most forcibly was that manservant's attitude towards Sandgate.'

'He needed a good setting-down and he did not get it? Obviously he has no respect for his master's poor relation, which is what you take Sandgate to be.'

‘The man behaved to Sandgate as though he recognised no difference in their social standing.’

‘Perhaps he is resentful at being left on duty while the other servants are absent.’

‘I suppose that could be so. All the same, although Jack may be as good as his master and, in some cases, very much better, I am a stickler for the old values and I think that dependants should pay lip-service to their employer and not attempt to bridge the gap which custom and usage have placed between them. It is better and more convenient for both sides to have it so.’

‘But this Wicklow chap probably sees the two of them as fellow workers in the same vineyard.’

‘But even in a vineyard there are the supervisor and the supervised.’

‘I am sorry you went, as you obtained no satisfaction from the visit,’ said Lilian Saltergate, ‘and I am sorrier still that your car passed Malpas’s on the road back and so he knows you went. What kind of man is the bailiff?’

‘I did not care for him. I received the impression that he has some axe of his own to grind and that the rift between Malpas and myself fits in with his plans.’

‘It would be interesting to know whether Malpas got any more satisfaction from him than you did.’

‘Tynant was in the car with Malpas, but I don’t know whether he went into the house with him.’

‘Probably not. Malpas prefers to play a lone hand unless he is in need of help. Do you think there is anything between him and Susannah?’

‘Between Malpas and Susannah? I thought she and Tynant—’

‘I am not so sure. I have seen glances exchanged and a hand brushed against another hand.’

‘You scandal-mongering woman!’

‘It’s all very well to laugh, but Susannah is very lovely; very intelligent, too.’

'And Veryan is a married man.'

'Not any more. Oh, dear, my head-in-the-sand old ostrich, you *are* behind the times! They divorced each other ages ago. It was kept very quiet, but it happened.'

'One sees their names as attending the same conferences. They are listed as Professor and Mrs Veryan.'

'What of it? She goes as a delegate in her own right, the same as she always did. It only means that she hasn't married again, that's all. Is the Holdy estate a large one?'

'I should think so, but probably not of very much value. There would not be rich grazing or prosperous large farms around here. The size of the estates in this part of the country was achieved because the local nobility and gentry intermarried and added one estate to another and, of course, in England the property is not divided up when the father dies. The younger sons often come off very badly.'

'But this - what was his name?'

'Sandgate. No, he is not a younger son. He is the owner's cousin.'

'Why didn't you like him?'

'Perhaps because his name is reminiscent (to him) of mine. He suggested that we ought to get on well together. Somehow I felt there was something behind the remark.'

' "As I came through Sandgate I heard a lassie sing", ' said Lilian, turning to go up to change for dinner.

As she came from the bathroom into the bedroom, Edward said, 'Even if I have to stand at my flanking-towers with a shotgun, Malpas is not going to touch them. His wretched dig could do irreparable damage and I won't put up with that.'

'Stop worrying yourself, and don't envisage situations which will probably never arise. Do you think the Horse and Cart will improve on last night's offering of stewed steak and dumplings, followed by rice pudding and very sour plums? I suppose in the depths of winter they serve

cold chicken and salad, followed by an ice-cream sundae. This is a loathsome little inn.'

'We could always move to the Barbican.'

'And have you and Malpas throwing crusty rolls at one another? Anyway, I've made Malpas and Nicholas feed those two boys and get them an occasional bath. Nicholas is your best bet, you know. If anybody can restrain Malpas, he can.'

'If the worst looks like coming to the worst...' began Edward, but Lilian did not allow him to finish.

'I will tell Nicholas that Malpas takes more than a fatherly interest in Susannah,' she said, her plump, smooth face creasing suddenly into a smile, 'then he will murder Malpas and all will be well.'

'You shouldn't make jokes about murder.'

'Oh, oh! Who talked of guarding our walls with a shotgun?'

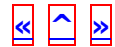
'Malpas adopts an irritatingly superior attitude in comparing his work with mine. When he has satisfied himself with his Bronze Age burials, the ground will all be smoothed over again, as though nothing had ever happened to it, but my restoration of the castle defences will last a thousand years. Doesn't that mean something?'

'Nothing means anything to a fanatic except his own fanaticism.'

'Perhaps that applies to me as well as to him, and he may learn *that* to his cost!'

6

Humpty Dumpty



Dear Godmother,' (wrote Bonamy), 'Tom and I are now the shadows of our former selves. We have moved blocks of stone which would have made Samson blench, swept up and dumped mountains of lung-corroding debris, all this at Saltergate's behest, and for Veryan we have delved, toiled and sweated to make a vast ring round most of the outer bailey.

'Now, however, we have decided to go on strike. The idea was mooted by the two girls, Fiona and Priscilla. They waylaid us after the morning's work and told us that they were fed to the teeth with slave labour and proposed to take next weekend off. We are all for this flouting of authority and have backed the project. We shall cruise about in my car – the girls have hired Tom's – and take the tent and the sleeping-bags and hey! for the open road.

'We, all four of us, have put our point of view to our taskmasters and found it unopposed. As a matter of fact there has been what we think is a major row between Veryan and the Saltergates. There have been comings and goings between the castle and the house where the owner lives, but we gather that nothing has been settled. The owner himself is away and nobody else will take the responsibility of making a decision.

‘Anyway, what it comes to is that the two girls and ourselves are off the lead for the whole of next weekend. Our elders (if I can call the lovely Susannah an Elder – she was rather up against such in Holy Writ if I recollect the story correctly and, as a graduate and as Tynant’s piecie-missie she far outranks us), our elders, I think, won’t be sorry to see the back of us for a day or two in the hope that, if the work on the site is held up for a bit, things may begin to sort themselves out. There is certainly a lot of fur, feathers and bad blood about at present. Very uncomfortable and unpleasant for live-and-let-live blokes like ourselves.

‘What the girls propose to do I have no idea. They definitely won’t be coming with us, although a certain amount of fraternisation has taken place owing to a strong, mutual reaction against all the hard, tedious work we have been doing. In the early mornings Tom and I have also searched for our well and so put more work on ourselves. So far, we think we have located *three* wells.

‘However, we have discovered that the job of clearing them is impossible without expert help. We asked Saltergate about this, although we did not tell him our reason for asking. He said that it would need some sort of thing like the apparatus for boring for oil, he thought, and simply wasn’t worthwhile. Locating the wells was important to him, it was clear, but so long as they could be marked in on his plan he was satisfied. To us they mean nothing if they cannot be cleared, so we have almost given up hope of the treasure.

‘We feel bound to stay on the dig for a bit (after we have had our weekend) because

Veryan has paid our expenses, but we shall get away as soon as it seems decent to do so. I rather wish we had never heard of the treasure and had gone to Greece as we planned.

‘Your affectionate godson,
Bonamy

PS Could Tom and I pop in to see you before we return to the chain-gang next week? Would Monday morning be all right?’

Before the break from work took place, the site received its first visit from the bailiff of the Holdy estate.

‘So pleased you are interested enough to come and have a look around,’ said Saltergate. ‘As you say you have not seen the castle before, shall we begin with the keep and work downwards? Please be a little careful when we have climbed the newel stair. The remaining fabric is safe enough, but there is very little of the parapet left and it is, in any case, not the original termination of the tower. That was destroyed at the end of the siege during the Civil War. I’ll go first, shall I? From the top one gets a comprehensive view of the whole layout. You will then understand better what I’m talking about when we make the round of the fortifications.’

‘Good of you to offer to take so much trouble, but I really only came along to get a general idea,’ said Sandgate. ‘I don’t intend to waste your time, you know.’

Edward, however, was adamant and insisted upon a complete survey. When they reached the gatehouse Malpas Veryan was there.

‘Ah,’ he said to Sandgate, ‘nice to see you. I’m afraid I have nothing much to show you except a partly dug trench, but, when we get to what we’re looking for, it will be a great deal more interesting.’

Sandgate looked at the excavations and then at his watch and said that he would be interested to be kept informed of the progress made, but that he was pressed for

time that morning. All the same, he walked back with Malpas to the castle ditch.

‘You didn’t dig this,’ he said. ‘There’s grass growing on the sides.’

‘Yes, but it gave us our very first clue and certainly is a very important item. It has been deepened considerably since the Bronze Age, but its position and its otherwise strange curvature are our clues to the extent of the original burying-place.’

‘Ah! The original burying-place? I hope to be along again when you locate that,’ said Sandgate eagerly.

‘Well,’ said Dame Beatrice in the middle of the following Monday morning, ‘so you have taken weekend leave of absence.’

‘Playing hookey, I call it,’ said Laura.

‘Have a heart, Mrs Gavin,’ said Tom, ‘and don’t mock the sultry toilers. You see before you two exhausted and broken men.’

‘You both *look* extremely well,’ said Dame Beatrice, ‘even if, apart from your labours, you have found yourselves in the centre of the maelstrom of dissension which you have described to us.’

‘We have also had a visit from the representative of the lord of the manor. Our work was inspected and received a nod from an obviously ignorant and, I thought, rather repellent individual who came in a car and gave our work supercilious approval,’ said Bonamy. ‘I am sure he didn’t understand a word of what Veryan was telling him about our trenches. Obviously he had never heard of Bronze Age barrows and I should say that the last thing he thought Veryan and Tynant were looking for was just a cist grave and some mouldy old bones and a beaker or two.’

‘And who was this representative?’

‘Chap named Sandgate. We were introduced to him, but I doubt whether I shall ever put him on my visiting list. He’s cousin to Mr Mathew, the owner of the estate, and is

acting as bailiff while Mr Mathew is on holiday. I noted that his car was chauffeur driven, but the chauffeur looked more like a plug-ugly to me than a discreet and respectful manipulator of gears and accelerators. Sandgate has promised – some would say threatened – to pay us further visits.'

'I thought he was unhealthily interested in our doings,' said Tom. 'I hope he hasn't heard about the treasure. There was an acquisitive gleam in his fishy eye, I fancy.'

'Veryan and Saltergate were on best behaviour after their skirmishing,' said Bonamy. 'There had been wars and rumours of wars. How do you *really* think we look?'

'Sunburnt, cheerful and fit,' said Laura. 'Do tell us about the row at the castle. I love other people's quarrels. They are the stuff drama is made of.'

'Oh, this is one of those polite, frosty affairs. There is nothing dramatic about it. Veryan's henge and ditch are likely to encroach on Saltergate's wall defences, so both sides have suspended operations *pro tem* while they thrash out the rights and wrongs. Tom and I are preserving a strict neutrality, but the distaff side (as, saving your presence, Mistress Gavin, is its wont) has waded in up to the neck. Susannah Lochlure is championing Veryan because she is by way of being Nicholas Tynant's fancy, and he, of course, has to be on Veryan's side. Lilian Saltergate, as in honour bound, speaks up forthrightly for her spouse, and there is division of opinion between Fiona Broadmayne and Priscilla Yateley. Fiona supports Susannah, who supports Tynant, who supports Veryan. But Priscilla is on the side of the Saltergates.'

'And hold you no brief for either party?' asked Dame Beatrice. 'Even neutrals often have opinions.'

'Not us. We couldn't care less. As for Veryan's and Tynant's beastly Bronze Age tomb, I wish they would trench right through the middle of the circle they've pegged out. They would be bound to find the grave that

way, if it's there, but apparently there's a tedious scientific way of going about these excavations. You should hear Veryan on the subject of vandals who, in former times, have done what we suggest.'

'So, at some time or other, Professor Veryan's wide trench is going to undermine the foundations of one of Mr Saltergate's flanking-towers,' said Dame Beatrice.

'I shouldn't have thought one tower would matter,' said Tom. 'If you ask me, both parties were pretty fed-up from the very outset when they found that the other lot had been given permission to work on the site. They pretended to accept each other graciously at first, but that's all over now. You ought to come back with us this afternoon and look at the work we've been doing,' said Bonamy.

'Well,' said Laura, looking hopefully at Dame Beatrice, 'there's the Seagull hotel at Holdy Bay. No doubt they could have us a bit later on. Perhaps the dispute about the trench will be resolved by then. I'd love to see what the castle looks like now.'

The subject was dropped. Lunch passed pleasantly and early in the afternoon the young men took their leave and drove back to the castle. There was a policeman at the gatehouse and another was on duty on top of the hill. The caravan and Tom's car had disappeared and there was nobody on the site, although that in itself was not strange. It was the presence of the police which was disconcerting.

'Something wrong, sergeant?' asked Bonamy.

'Who are you, sir?'

'My name is Monkswood. My friend and I have been away for the weekend since Friday afternoon. Up to that time we've been helping out here at the castle. What's been happening? Why are you here?'

'You will find the Superintendent at the Barbican hotel in the village, sir.' He took out a notebook, added, 'He will be glad to see you two gentlemen,' and then inscribed Bonamy's name after he had asked for the initials. He then

asked for Tom's full name, wrote that down, too, and asked where they had come from.

'Not your home address, but where you were last night, sir?'

'We camped near the Stone House, Wandles Parva, in Hampshire, the home of my godmother, Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley.'

'The Superintendent will certainly wish to see you, sir. You had best go along at once. He will have interviewed the rest of your party by now.'

'What has happened to the caravan and the car which were parked here?' asked Tom.

'They have been removed to the village car park, sir. You will have no difficulty in locating them.'

'Can't you tell us *anything* about what has been going on?'

'No, sir, I have no instructions to that effect.'

'Can we go up to the keep? We've left some gear there,' said Bonamy.

'Nobody is allowed beyond this point, sir. Your property will be quite safe.'

'Come on, Bonamy,' said Tom. They got into Bonamy's car and drove to the Barbican. Bonamy went up to the reception counter.

'Mr Monkswood and Mr Hassocks,' he said. 'You know us, I think. We have had meals here with Mr Tynant and Professor Veryan.'

'Which is a gentleman you won't ever sit down at table with again,' said the receptionist.

'What!'

'Found dead first thing this morning up at the castle. Mr Tynant and the police are through here.' She folded back the flap of the counter, led them through a room at the back of her office and tapped on a further door. 'Mr Monkswood and Mr Hassocks are here,' she said.

The room to which they had been admitted was small and overcrowded. All the castle party were there, with the obvious exception of Veryan. At a table sat two men in plain clothes. One of them looked round and then indicated two vacant chairs.

‘So now we have a full house,’ he said, in a tone of satisfaction. ‘All I am doing at present, gentlemen, is checking where everybody has been during the weekend. There has been a serious accident resulting in the death of Professor Veryan. He appears to have been alone on the tower of the castle and to have fallen. In all cases of this sort we have to conduct an official enquiry before the coroner takes over, so, if I could just have an account of how you two gentlemen spent your weekend, that will round out my little *dossier* and we can all go off and have our tea. Now, Mr Monkswood.’ The other plain-clothes policeman opened the door and the rest of the party filed out.

‘When did he – when did the accident happen?’ asked Tom.

‘The medical evidence will come out at the inquest, sir. When did you leave the castle ruins?’

‘On Friday at about midday,’ said Bonamy. ‘Professor Veryan was quite all right then. He walked with us to our car and then he and Mr Tynant went off to have their lunch and Hassocks and I drove to the pub in the village of Stint Magna, where we usually get our snacks at lunchtime, and then we toured and messed about and camped out until today, when we called on my godmother, Dame Beatrice Lestrangle Bradley, had lunch with her at her home, the Stone House, and came back here.’

‘Where were you last night, sir?’

‘Last night? We slept in our tent on the edge of the New Forest. It’s a bit of rough land belonging to my godmother and adjoining her grounds, so we knew it was all right to be there.’

‘Were there other campers with you?’

‘No, of course not. It’s private land belonging to Dame Beatrice, a sort of paddock, in fact.’

‘This was last night. What about the night before?’

‘We slept in the car. We were up on Campdown and tried pitching the tent, but it was too windy.’

‘Thank you, Mr Monkswood. I’d just like a word with Mr Hassocks, and then I’m through for the time being. Now, Mr Hassocks, what made you two gentlemen come to the hotel at this time of day? I was told that you were not due here until just on time for your evening dinner and never came here earlier than seven o’clock.’

‘We drove back to the castle to unload our sleeping-bags and take them up to the keep, but the police sergeant at the gatehouse said you were at the hotel and wanted to see us. Look here, it’s been a bit of a shock, you know. Veryan dead? How did it happen? I mean, how did he come to fall off the tower?’

‘That is the object of our investigation, sir, to find out how it happened. All we know at present is that Professor Veryan’s body was found at the foot of the castle tower by Mr Nicholas Tynant and it is presumed that he had fallen from the top on to a heap of broken stone below. So the two folding camp-beds and other items which we found inside the tower are the property of you and Mr Monkswood, are they?’

‘Yes. We’ve been sleeping there, but we only took sleeping-bags for this weekend’s camping.’

‘For how long, sir, have you been sleeping in the castle tower?’

‘Ever since Professor Veryan and Mr Saltergate began work in the castle grounds. We’d got the gear, you see, for sleeping out and it saved hotel bills. Using the keep saved us the trouble of putting up a tent.’

‘Were you aware that Professor Veryan was in the habit of taking a telescope up to the top of the tower at night to

study the stars?’

‘He couldn’t have done that. We should have heard him, unless he sneaked up while we were at the pub. Even so, you know, we should have heard him when he came down, and we never did. I don’t suppose he stayed there all night, did he?’

‘He was wearing tennis shoes when he was found and young gentlemen like yourselves are sound sleepers. He had a key to the hotel front door and the staff had instructions not to shoot the bolts. He secured them after he had let himself in each night.’

‘So the hotel staff knew about him and his telescope,’ said Tom.

‘The receptionist and the porter knew. The manager did not know. It was left to the discretion of the desk clerk to give the key to any guest who expected to be out after eleven-thirty at night because the hotel does not employ a night-porter, so it was quite in order for the girl to let Professor Veryan have the key, although it was unusual for the same person to have it night after night.

‘What would have happened if somebody else had wanted the key?’

‘I have no information, sir. Apparently the question did not arise. There are no evening entertainments in the village and after dinner it would be too late for people to get to the pictures, or whatever, at Holdy Bay. I understand that in the evenings you two gentlemen left the hotel after dinner and did not join Professor Veryan and Mr Tynant again until breakfast on the following day.’

‘We’d been with them all the morning and at dinner, so for their sakes as well as ours we found this snug little pub in Stint Magna and we used to have our lunchtime snack and our evening drinks there.’

‘Can you give me any proof that you spent last night in a tent in Dame Beatrice’s paddock? I don’t doubt whatever that you did spend the night in the vicinity of the Stone

House, but we have to ask these routine questions when there is anything suspicious about a death.'

'Suspicious? You mean Professor Veryan's death wasn't an accident?'

'We have to bear all possibilities in mind, sir, and we think it highly suspicious that he met his death when the tower was empty, with you two gentlemen away, so that nobody would have heard him cry out when he fell.'

'What about the girls in the caravan? Didn't *they* hear anything?'

'If you mean Dr Lochlure and her two students, they say they were not there. They also say that they would have taken no action even if they *had* heard anything. They would have supposed it would only have been a drunken villager or some other tipsy person. In any case, the tower is some way off from where the caravan was parked, and ladies have good reason, unfortunately, in these days, to stay safely within four walls after dark, especially in lonely neighbourhoods. Well, that's all for the present, gentlemen.'

'Except for deciding where we're going to sleep tonight,' said Tom to Bonamy, as they went back to Bonamy's car. This point was settled by Tynant at dinner that evening.

'Veryan's room is locked up for the time being,' he said, 'and anyway I don't suppose you would care, either of you, to occupy it. The hotel can give you a two-bed room in a cottage which they use as an annexe when the hotel is full. I think you had better accept. As what has happened is no fault of yours, I am prepared to pay for your lodging.'

'No need, sir,' said Tom. 'We have a tent and we've got our sleeping-bags.'

'They won't allow you at the foot of the castle mound. There isn't anywhere else where you could pitch a tent and they certainly won't allow you to sleep in the keep, even if you wanted to do so.'

‘Look here, sir,’ said Bonamy, ‘they don’t *really* suspect foul play, do they?’

‘They are treating the circumstances with reservations, let us say.’

‘But why? I’ve climbed that newel stair and it would be easy enough to fall from the top in the dark if you weren’t careful. At one place there is less than a foot of the parapet left standing.’

‘I have not been up there myself, but Edward Saltergate made that very observation. All the same, poor Veryan had been up there almost every evening since we’ve been here. He should not have been in any danger on territory he must have known so well. Mind you, anybody can overbalance. The police think he was sitting on the wall and tipped over backwards.’

‘I suppose there will have to be an inquest, sir? Shall we all be asked to attend it?’

‘Well, Saltergate and I have been told to see that none of our party leaves until it is over.’

‘What do *you* think happened, sir? That policeman—’

‘The Detective-Superintendent.’

‘Oh, is he? He let it out that they thought it very peculiar that the accident happened while everybody was away. What was everyone else doing?’

‘Well, the rest of us spent the weekend in various ways. In other words, we all thought your idea was a good one and that it wouldn’t hurt if the rest of us relaxed a little. I’m afraid the work was beginning to pall. It’s all hard slog and, up to the present, nothing much to show for it.’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said Tom. ‘If it weren’t for the ditch and the trench, neither of which can be disguised, the castle would now look a lot tidier than it did when we first came. Gosh! My deltoids and hamstrings! My once limber knees and delicately tended hands! I shall never be the same man again.’

‘Oh, well, any alteration must be an improvement,’ said Bonamy. ‘Don’t you think so, sir?’

‘Why – I’ve often wondered – why did you two fellows come here in the first place?’ asked Tynant.

‘We wanted a cheap holiday and to do a bit of reading for our finals and stooge about the neighbourhood and live the simple life. We got caught up in the works when you and Mr Saltergate came along and wanted volunteers, that’s all.’

‘I see. Well, look, here’s the key to the cottage. It’s on the left as you leave the village square. You can’t mistake it. It’s got an outside stone staircase up to the bedrooms, and that’s the way you get in, because there is no door at street level.’

‘These quaint old Spanish customs!’ said Tom, when they had climbed the outside stair and let themselves in. ‘I noted that you teetered on the edge of telling Tynant about our well. I’m glad you didn’t.’

‘You don’t still have hopes of finding the treasure, do you? So why are you glad I didn’t say anything? I *was* inclined to, as you surmise, but I decided he might think me rather young for my age if I started waffling about buried treasure.’

‘Well, that was probably good thinking. Why am I glad you didn’t say anything? I’ll tell you. Against all the odds, I’ve got a feeling that we are destined to find that hoard.’

‘God bless you for an innocent, wide-eyed boy!’

‘There is no such thing as an innocent boy and boys are only wide-eyed at the sight of lavish, luxurious food. You know, it’s pretty decent of Tynant to have fixed us up in this bijou residence. I can’t help wondering, though, why the police want to keep us all on the spot, but, because they so obviously *do* want to, I wonder whether we ought to come clean about Virginia and Sarah.’

‘Good heavens, no!’ said Bonamy, horrified. ‘If there’s going to be a stink – and it looks that way – we can’t involve

two innocent young girls. They couldn't possibly know anything about Veryan's death. Keep your fingers crossed and your trap shut. If Veryan hadn't been an eminent man, there would have been none of this fussation about what must have been a perfectly simple accident.'

'It's funny it happened just when it did, though. *That's* what is bothering the *gendarmes*,' said Tom.

'Yes, and that brings me to something else. What on earth made you mention *the girls* in the caravan to that rozzer? A good thing he thought you meant Fiona and Priscilla. Nobody must know that Virginia and Sarah slept there while Veryan was flinging himself off that tower.'


'Suicide, do you think?'

'I am not thinking anything at all.'

'I wish I felt sorrier about his death.'

'We all will, later on. We're all suffering from shock at present.'

7 Alibis

After breakfast Bonamy telephoned the Stone House. 

‘Don’t bother about coming to the castle at present,’ he said. ‘Work is suspended and everything is haywire.’

‘Oh? Has somebody found the treasure?’ asked Laura, who took the call.

‘Lord, no, nothing like that. There has been an accident and Veryan is dead.’

‘Hold on. I’ll get Dame B.’

‘So what has happened to cause Professor Veryan’s death?’ Dame Beatrice enquired.

‘He fell from the top of the keep and busted his head and his spine. The police are here and none of us knows whether we’re coming or going.’

‘Are you and Tom free to come here and tell us all about it? When did it happen?’

‘The night Tom and I slept in your paddock. Tynant is worried. The police are as busy as a colony of ants. He says he thinks they have a suspicion that something other than an accident was the cause of Veryan’s death.’

‘I think, in that case, you certainly had better come here at once. If the police are difficult about it, refer them to me, and I will pull my rank, as Laura would put it.’

‘Does that mean it’s serious?’

‘Probably not, so far as you and Tom are concerned, but your interests must be protected. Is there any chance that it could have been suicide?’

‘I think the attitude of the police suggests something a lot more sinister than that. They are questioning us and probing and ferreting around in the most unnerving manner. Young Priscilla, who is scared almost out of her wits, asked me if it was possible to commit murder in your sleep. I think she has almost persuaded herself that she did the deed under those circumstances. However, she is a poet and, to that extent, mad.’

‘So the police have made no secret of their suspicions of murder?’

‘The word itself has not been used yet, but actions speak louder than words and they are turning the village and the castle upside down and all of our party inside out.’

Somewhat to Bonamy’s surprise, the Detective-Superintendent made no objection to the visit to Dame Beatrice.

‘We have checked on the information you gave us, sir,’ he said, ‘and Dame Beatrice has confirmed that you and Mr Hassocks were at the Stone House on Monday when you said you were, and that you yourself are well known to her from childhood. When your visit is over, we shall expect to be informed of your whereabouts.’

‘Oh, yes, of course. I say, does that mean you think there was something fishy about Veryan’s death?’

‘We are always very thorough in our investigations into “accidental” deaths, especially those of eminent persons which occur under highly suspicious circumstances, sir.’

‘How do you mean – highly suspicious circumstances?’

‘Now, sir, you must not question a police officer who is only performing his duty. The Chief Constable sends his regards to Dame Beatrice. She has been in touch with him.’

‘So she did pull her rank,’ said Bonamy to Tom, when they were on their way to the Stone House, ‘and I take it very kind of her, because it’s a thing she hates and detests doing.’

‘You don’t suppose she thinks we might be in trouble?’

‘We haven’t an alibi, you know.’

‘Neither has anybody else, so far as I can see.’

‘The Saltergates? After all, if the police are going to find out about that row between them and Veryan, Edward Saltergate will come under suspicion, so it’s lucky for him that he can prove he was safely in harbour at the Horse and Cart.’

‘But can he prove it? I should have thought it was almost impossible to prove that you were in bed with your wife while evil deeds were being committed.’

‘Somebody at the Horse and Cart would have known if he had sneaked out at night.’

‘I doubt it. These country people sleep like the dead. Besides, he wouldn’t need to use the front door to get in and out. There’s an iron fire-escape staircase reaching right up to the roof, so it must connect with every floor.’

‘You know,’ said Bonamy, ‘I think the police have something to go on, apart from mere suspicion and being thorough, and all that. I wonder what it is? It must be a real clue of some sort.’

‘Well, it was strange that the thing happened just when it did, with everybody away except the Saltergates. It almost lets them out, alibi or no alibi, if you see what I mean. If an intelligent man like Saltergate meant to murder somebody, he wouldn’t do it when he was the only man on the spot, especially if the murder was the result of a quarrel.’

When lunch was over at the Stone House, Dame Beatrice and Laura took the young men into the library, ‘As being,’ said Laura, ‘a room of more sober aspect than the drawing-room,’ and there the conference was held.

‘I gather,’ said Dame Beatrice, ‘that the death took place at night.’

‘Yes. It seems that Veryan was a bit of an amateur astronomer. He used to take his telescope up to the top of the keep and study the stars from there.’

‘I thought you two slept in the keep. You say “it seems”. Does that mean you were unaware until now that he must always have passed through your sleeping quarters to get to the newel staircase?’

‘We’ve discussed that,’ said Tom. ‘We think he must have gone to the keep and climbed the stair before we got back from the pub.’

‘That would account for his comings, but what about his goings?’

‘Must have been some time after we were asleep. The newel stair is in the opposite corner from where our beds were placed and the keep is pretty wide. Besides, apparently he wore sneakers on these occasions, so, unless he fell over something or made any other kind of noise, we wouldn’t have been disturbed. We had worked very hard during the mornings, including the time we spent looking for our well before breakfast each day, and then we would drive to our pub after dinner and stay there until closing time.’

‘So all work at the castle has ceased. Is that a temporary measure? Will the parties carry on later?’

‘I think they may. Tynant is staying on, anyway, after the inquest, to carry on with the Bronze Age dig.’

‘If the police have questioned all the members of the party – separately, I suppose you mean – and are still there, they certainly have their suspicions,’ said Laura.

‘Well, there were two rather strange things about the night of the accident. We told them about our being here instead of in the keep when the accident happened.’

‘But it doesn’t seem as though you could have prevented the accident if you *had* been there.’

‘No, but we might have heard him yell out as he fell. In that case we could have rushed out and got a doctor to him straight away. It might have done some good.’

‘What was the other strange thing?’

‘On that night the three women weren’t in their caravan any more than we were in the keep. I don’t know what they’d been doing for the rest of the weekend, but Dr Lochlure and Tynant were in Holdy Bay on that particular day. It was Sunday, if you remember. Tom and I left you early on Monday afternoon. Well, apparently Tynant’s car broke down (or he says it did) soon after they had left Holdy Bay on Sunday night. He tinkered about with it, but soon realised there was nothing he could do, so he walked Dr Susannah back to the hotel at which they had dined – not the Seagull, but the other one – and made them give her a bed for the night. Then he walked all the way back to the Barbican and, not liking to knock them up in the small hours, he says he sat on the stone coping until the sleeping-out staff arrived on duty and went in with them.’

‘What of Dr Lochlure?’

‘Says she got a taxi after an early breakfast in Holdy Bay on Monday morning and was back at the caravan before the two girls arrived a bit later.’

‘So where had the two women students been?’

‘Well, it was they who were responsible for our deciding to play hooky for the weekend. They had struck work and, like true daughters of Eve, had tempted us to do likewise. Fiona’s home is only about thirty miles from the castle, and Priscilla has friends who live on a farm between Holdy Bay and Fiona’s home, so, as they have the use of Tom’s car, Fiona dropped Priscilla off at the farm, went on home and picked up Priscilla again first thing on Monday morning. It appears they and Dr Lochlure were accustomed to wait in the caravan after breakfast for Mrs Saltergate to come and dig them out for the start of the day’s work. On Monday it wasn’t she who came; it was the police. Then, I suppose, it all happened at once – police towing their caravan away and ordering them to take Tom’s car to the car park and then the general round-up at the Barbican, where they were given the news. Of course Tom and I didn’t show up

until nearly teatime because, while all this was going on, we were here with you.'

'That appears to account for everybody except for Mr and Mrs Saltergate,' said Dame Beatrice.

'They were staying at the Horse and Cart, the other hotel in the village. The first they knew was when they got a phone message from Tynant to tell them that Veryan had had a fatal accident and to ask them to come round to the Barbican instead of going to the castle.'

'What did the police think of what various people told them? Were they satisfied with it?' asked Laura.

'We don't know. Of course, at first nobody let on that there had been a disagreement between Veryan and Saltergate. It wasn't all that serious, anyway, I'm sure. A compromise would have been reached if Veryan had lived. Until the little skirmish about the trench, the two sides had always got on perfectly well together and were sharing Tom and me and the two navvies in the most amicable fashion - at least, I thought so. Anyway, the police got to know about the quarrel, but we don't know who blew the gaff.'

'Probably nobody did, in that sense,' said Laura. 'The police are pretty good at deducing that sort of thing.'

'Whatever people want to think, I don't believe Veryan's death was an accident,' said Tom.

'Oh? Why?' asked Laura.

'Too many alibis floating around.'

'Your own being one of them, of course.'

'Unfortunately - or perhaps fortunately, no. You can only swear that we were with you from about ten on Monday morning until after lunch, and that's no help at all,' said Bonamy.

'I bet the coroner brings in death by misadventure,' Tom went on. 'Is that quite the same as "accidental death"?''

'Whether it's the same or not, it makes no difference from a practical point of view,' said Bonamy. 'Either verdict takes the police out of the picture, but I agree with you. I'm

sure the police are not satisfied and I'm sure they have something specific to go on in their not being satisfied.'

'Suspicious of all those alibis,' said Tom, 'and I don't blame them.'

'Granted, but I think they've got hold of something else. Wish I knew what it was.'

'Tell me all that you can about your weekend,' said Dame Beatrice. 'You think you have no alibi, but one never knows.'

'As we indicated, we're not at all sure we want to produce an alibi when all the others are so sketchy.'

'Are they, indeed? Perhaps we will examine them in detail later. What about your own adventures?'

'We didn't have any. We left the castle as soon as the Friday morning work was finished, had a snack and a beer at our usual pub at Stint Magna and then went wherever the car took us. We collected up bread and cake and cheese and beer, so that, if we couldn't find anywhere to have an evening blow-out, we wouldn't go hungry or thirsty and at about six in the evening we began looking about for somewhere to pitch the tent. As we were by the sea, we decided to sleep on the sands. There are worse beds'than a soft, dry sand-dune.'

'Go on,' said Laura sceptically. 'Such as what?'

'Sometimes Tom had the wheel and sometimes I did,' said Bonamy, ignoring the question and also avoiding his godmother's suddenly enlightened eye. 'We did not go far on the Friday afternoon - about eighty or ninety miles. On Saturday we stopped in the afternoon to watch a village cricket match—'

' "Caught at point by a man in braces",' murmured Laura.

'— and then we drove on to the moors, but up there it was so windy that we didn't attempt to put up the tent. The heather was quite dry and beautifully springy, so we tried that in turns while the other one had the back seat of the

car. But, of course, those are not the nights that matter. It was on the Sunday night that Veryan either fell or was pushed, and that's the night we slept in your paddock with never a soul to know we were there.'

'You ought to have come up to the house and let us give you some supper,' said Laura. 'Then we could have given you a cast-iron alibi.'

'It was too late to disturb you. We didn't get here until after eleven. Your Dobermanns would have torn us to bits if we'd come up to the house at that time of night.'

'They wouldn't tear anybody to bits. They would be very menacing and kick up the devil of a shindy, but they wouldn't savage anybody who was not threatening Dame B. or myself.'

'Well,' said Dame Beatrice, 'you certainly have not furnished yourselves with an alibi, and your simple, unembroidered story rings so false that it must be conceded that you could have pushed Professor Veryan off the tower, driven here during the night and appeared daisy-fresh at my front door on Monday morning. Let us abandon this sad scenario and concentrate on those alibis which *do* appear to exist.'

'I suppose the two girls' statements will hold water,' said Laura.

'Yes,' said Bonamy. 'Fiona's parents will vouch for her, I suppose, and Priscilla's friends ditto.'

'What of Mr Tynant and Dr Lochlure?' asked Dame Beatrice. 'Are their alibis equally sound?'

'Hardly. It seems to me that Tynant's has great big holes in it,' said Bonamy, 'and I'll tell you why. When we got back to the castle on Monday afternoon, the police wouldn't let us park my car at the foot of the mound, but sent us to the village car park. Tynant's car was there. I recognised it. It couldn't have broken down late on Sunday night. He could not have got a garage to salvage it, repair it and get it back to the village in so short a time.'

‘You would have to prove that,’ said Laura. ‘You did not see the car until nearly teatime, remember. It *could* have been put right in an hour or so. It would depend on what was wrong with it and how busy the garage was.’

‘I’ll bet the two of them spent the night in Holdy Bay, all the same,’ said Tom, ‘and came back in the car on Monday morning.’

‘Under the suspect names of Mr and Mrs Smith?’ asked Laura, grinning. ‘Surely not, in this day and age!’

‘Actually it would strengthen their alibi if they *did* spend the night at a Holdy Bay hotel, I suppose,’ said Tom, ‘because the hotel staff could swear to them. If you accept Tynant’s version, it seems to put Dr Lochlure in the clear, but to make his alibi the weakest of all, except—’

‘Except for the Saltergates,’ Dame Beatrice pointed out. ‘Not only were they still in the village, but they are the people who are known to have quarrelled with Professor Veryan. But I think it is premature to talk about suspects. We must hear the coroner’s verdict before we jump to too many conclusions. There were injuries to the head and the spine, you tell me.’

‘So Tynant told us,’ said Tom. ‘Veryan landed on a pile of masonry which Saltergate’s party had cleared out of the keep. It wasn’t all that far to fall, and I suppose, if he’d landed on grass, the fall would not have been fatal, but he couldn’t have stood any chance if he hit his head on those jagged blocks of stone.’

‘I shall attend the inquest. Has either of you a reputation for practical joking?’

‘If you think that in a playful spirit we tilted Veryan over the edge of the keep, you’re wrong and you know it,’ said Bonamy. ‘Good Lord! You don’t think somebody will pull that one on us, do you?’

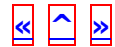
‘Well, we haven’t an alibi,’ said Tom, ‘but who on earth would have known we would need such a thing? Mind you —’

‘Ah!’ said Dame Beatrice. ‘Elsie and Lacey, or was there Tillie as well?’

‘You rotter!’ said Bonamy to Tom. ‘We said we wouldn’t mention them.’

8

Interested Parties



Except to those directly concerned and but for the fact that the deceased was an eminent man of letters, the inquest was as dull as Dame Beatrice had predicted it would be. A fairhaired woman wearing a black hat and a black band around the left sleeve of a light summer coat told the coroner that she was Grace Veryan, the former wife of the deceased, and that she identified the body as being that of her divorced husband.

The medical evidence followed. The spinal injury would have resulted in paralysis; the injuries to the head had caused death. The inference was that Professor Veryan had been seated on a low part of the wall and, in elevating his telescope, had overbalanced backwards on to the lethal collection of broken stones below. The time of death was put at between midnight and two in the morning.

No questions were asked by the jurors and the majority of those present were expecting a verdict of accidental death. However, at the conclusion of the medical evidence, Detective-Superintendent Mowbray asked for an adjournment. As the coroner granted this request without surprise or betraying any other emotion, it was clear that it had been anticipated before the inquest opened.

Dame Beatrice had been present, as she had promised. She and Laura took the two young men off to lunch at Holdy Bay. Tynant and the Saltergates went off with Mrs Veryan, but the two girls and Susannah lunched as usual in the caravan which, together with the boys' cars, had been

returned to its former position on the grass verge below the castle ruins.

‘Well,’ said Laura, ‘judging by the remarks I overheard as we left the court, that adjournment has given some of the citizens food for thought.’

‘Not to mention gossip,’ said Bonamy.

‘And the cold touch of fear,’ said Tom. ‘I refer to some of our lot. An adjournment can only mean one thing. As we suspected once Mowbray got to work, the police have doubts about an accident. I foresee that things are going to be very sticky and uncomfortable at Castle Holdy.’

‘Are you all continuing with the work?’ asked Laura.

‘It seems like it. I spoke to Saltergate and he sees no reason to pack up, and Tynant rather smugly says that in tribute to Veryan’s memory the dig must be completed.’

‘I noticed,’ said Dame Beatrice, ‘that the trench is now being dug from left to right.’

‘Yes. It was getting perilously near Saltergate’s territory when the row began, so Tynant is now boxing clever and biding his time. One thing, he will be easier to deal with than Veryan would have been, if it comes to the crunch.’

‘Well, *that* was a turn-up for the books,’ said Fiona.

‘It didn’t surprise *me*,’ said Priscilla. ‘I’ve been terrified ever since Monday when the police began questioning us all. It was pretty obvious then what they thought and it’s even more obvious now. They must have found what is known as a vital clue.’

‘That’s only what the newspapers call it. All the police will admit is that they’ve “got a lead”. I wonder what on earth it can be?’

‘Fingerprints where no fingerprints should be,’ said Susannah. ‘I wrote a detective story once and fingerprints played a big part in it.’

‘If it’s fingerprints they’re after, we have nothing to worry about,’ said Fiona. ‘Nobody has taken our dabs.’

‘There is plenty of time for that, though,’ said Priscilla, ‘and now that the inquest has been adjourned and everybody suspects that Professor Veyran met with foul play, anybody who objects to being fingerprinted will come under immediate suspicion.’

‘You talk like a character in a third-rate crime film,’ said Fiona, but she looked uneasy.

‘Oh, yes, Mrs Veyran,’ said Tynant, ‘I fully intend to complete Malpas’s work. We have gone so far now that it would be a pity not to finish.’

‘Tell me, Nicholas – and please call me Grace; you know me quite well enough for that – tell me what you really think about this tragic death.’

‘It is tragic, yes. A good man has been lost to our ranks.’

‘You say good. You do not say great.’

‘I am not given to expressing eulogies.’

‘Particularly in connection with a man who has always stood in your way.’

‘That is an unkind and a very unjust way of looking at it. I have always played second fiddle to Malpas, it is true. It was a state of affairs which might have continued until he retired—’

‘Or died,’ said Grace Veyran in a tone which could not be misunderstood. Tynant remained in control of himself, although his long mouth tightened before he said, ‘I was about to add: or until my book comes out.’

‘Your book?’

‘Already with the publishers. In it I refute all Malpas’s theories regarding monoxylous timber coffins in Lower Myria.’

‘But surely their distribution is known? Haven’t they been disinterred and examined?’

‘Yes, indeed, but where Malpas is wrong is in attributing them to the Middle Bronze Age. I place them five hundred years earlier. They belong to Early Bronze Age One.’

‘So your book attacks his theories. I don’t call that very friendly.’

‘It is not meant to be either friendly or unfriendly. It is a question of research and scholarship, that’s all. I am concerned only with the truth.’

‘Did Malpas know you had written this book?’

‘No. I intended to hit him for six with it when it comes out next year. All the fun has gone out of it now.’

‘What a little boy – and what a nasty little boy – you are!’

‘Why did he divorce you?’

‘He didn’t, nor I him. We simply lived apart for the statutory period and got our decree for the modern but incontrovertible reason that the marriage was an absolute failure. Who is the remarkably beautiful creature you sat next to in court?’

‘I sat next to *you*. Self-praise is no recommendation, so you must leave it to me to praise you if you are to be praised at all.’

‘Don’t fence! You know the woman I mean. She sat on the other side of you and I sensed considerable *rapport* between you.’

‘She is Dr Susannah Lochlure, and she belongs to Saltergate’s gang, not to ours.’

‘She looks well connected. Is she?’

‘I believe there’s an earldom kicking about in her family.’

‘Any money?’

‘Do earls usually have money nowadays?’

‘I have no idea. Still, blue blood is blue blood.’

‘Yes. “Would a baronet’s sister go in before the daughter of a younger son of a peer?” ’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘I’ve often wondered, ever since I read *The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner*. Do *you* know the answer?’

‘You are shelving the subject of that girl of yours. Anyway, I am not in the mood for flippancy.’

‘That girl of mine? I only wish she were! And I didn’t mean to be flippant. We’ve all had a shock and it takes people in different ways. It makes me want to make a parade of being nonsensical just to lessen the tension. You know what the police think.’

‘As the inquest has been adjourned, it is rather obvious what they think, but Edward Saltergate didn’t do it, you know. They were in the middle of a battle, you said, but poor old Edward is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. He is quite incapable of murdering anybody.’

‘Idiots have committed murder before now, and all mediaevalists are mad. Why should anyone who had any sense want to revive the Middle Ages? Much better lost and forgotten.’

‘I assume,’ said Dame Beatrice, at the dinner to which she had invited Edward and Lilian in Holdy Bay, ‘that you have something more in mind than the tidying-up of the castle ruins.’

‘If all goes well, we hope to embark on a partial reconstruction of the main features,’ said Edward. ‘The landowner is willing, there is sponsorship available from a couple of learned societies, a small government grant is promised, so, if my plans are approved, Lilian and I will take it in turn to supervise the work. I am anxious that the other project shall not encroach upon ours while the reconstruction is in progress.’

‘Ah, yes, the other project. You refer, no doubt, to Mr Tynant’s excavations. I am interested to learn that he proposes to continue them.’

‘You mean in light of the accident to poor Veryan? Yes, it might have seemed in better taste to discontinue the work, at any rate for a time.’

‘Was it generally known that Professor Veryan was an astronomer? But for that, he might still be alive.’

‘Well, yes, we did know of it. No doubt it was nothing more than a hobby. I suppose Tynant knew, and if he did he may have told Dr Lochlure and she may have told her two women undergraduates, I suppose.’

‘Why should you think she might have mentioned it to the undergraduates?’

‘Young women in these times are very much on their guard against prowlers. To reach the keep, Vryan would have needed to pass, each night, very near to the caravan in which the young women were sleeping. Some degree of reassurance would have been advisable in case the girls were aware of footsteps in the night. The castle precincts are outside the village. My wife, I know, would have been happier for the girls to be housed in some less isolated spot.’

‘Nonsense, Edward!’ said Lilian. ‘It was you who worried about them. I had no fears whatever on their account, particularly since Fiona Broadmayne was one of them. My sympathies would be entirely with the prowler if ever she got her powerful hands on him.’

‘ “My anxiety would be entirely for the snake”,’ said Dame Beatrice, in an absent-minded way.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Oh, no, I beg yours. I have picked up a bad habit from Laura of offering quotations in place of rational comment.’

‘What I can’t understand,’ said Lilian, ‘is how Malpas was able not only to pass by the caravan night after night without being heard, but to enter the keep and climb that stair, also night after night, without those two young men being aware of it.’

‘Of course, nobody was in the caravan or the keep on the night of the accident,’ said Edward. ‘All the same, as my wife points out, nobody ever seems to have heard Vryan moving about at night, so the fact that nobody was in the caravan or the keep on the night of his death appears to have no significance.’

‘We have had remarkably clear nights since we have been here,’ said Lilian. ‘Ideal for star-gazing, I suppose. Malpas was probably on the top of the tower as soon as it was dark and before the boys came in. That part seems simple enough, but he seems to have been able to leave the keep without waking them.’

‘I have been wondering whether the police think he committed suicide,’ said Edward.

‘Suicide is no longer a crime. Murder, of course, is a very different matter,’ said Dame Beatrice. ‘When did you yourselves first think of it?’

‘At first we were too much in shock to think at all, but then – well, we are people trained to assess evidence. The others are trained, too, and so are the police. Because of that stupid quarrel between Malpas and myself, tongues have been wagging, you may be sure, and naturally, for one wants to be reasonable, we are the obvious suspects. In time of trouble, everybody is anxious to find a scapegoat.’

‘I don’t know so much,’ said Laura, who, so far, had kept out of the conversation. ‘Looking at the thing from the point of view of a complete outsider and saving your presence and all that, would there have been much point in your getting rid of Veryan if Tynant was to be left alive to continue digging that trench?’

‘I don’t suppose any of us thought he *would* be carrying on with the work,’ said Edward dispassionately, ‘so I don’t believe that argument would hold water, kind though it is of you to put it forward.’

‘It holds water so long as Tynant remains alive and does not die under suspicious circumstances,’ said Lilian, ‘but not any longer than that.’

‘And, after all,’ said Laura, ‘at the resumed inquest there may still be a verdict of accidental death.’

The Saltergates drove back to Holdy village and the Horse and Cart, and Dame Beatrice and Laura settled down in a corner of the Seagull’s lounge.

‘I don’t see how anybody could suspect those two people of murder,’ said Laura.

‘Who would be your choice, then?’

‘Tynant, to get the dig to himself. Veryan obviously thought it an important one, or he would have met the Saltergates halfway instead of quarrelling with them. Of course the killer could have been Tom Hassocks, larking about and meaning no harm—’

‘Not Bonamy?’

‘I don’t want a godmother’s knife in my ribs, but, yes, and/or Bonamy, if you insist, or they may have mistaken Veryan for an unauthorised intruder. Then there are the three females. Their caravan was parked at the bottom of the mound, so any one of them – and I do not exclude the lovely Lochlure – had only to mount the rise and climb the tower to have fun and games with Veryan at the top of it. If the fun and games got out of hand, either the push over the edge could have been accidental or it could have been done a-purpose.’

‘You are not forgetting that everybody except the Saltergates has an alibi for the night of Veryan’s death, are you?’

‘Some alibis! I suppose the two girls can prove theirs, but all the others are suspect, including that of our two lads. Then there are the two workmen. They may have had a dispute with Veryan over pay or something.’

‘Tynant would have known of it and, no doubt, mentioned it as soon as it became obvious that the police had suspicions. In any case, workmen do not murder their employers; they go on strike, thus causing far more disruption than a mere death could do.’

‘Then there is Mrs Veryan. When in doubt, blame the nearest and dearest.’

‘According to what Nicholas Tynant told Bonamy and Bonamy told us, she was on a yacht at sea at the time.

Neither was she his nearest nor his dearest. She had been divorced from him for several years.'

'I wonder, then, why she was brought along to identify the body? Tynant, or any of the others, could have done it just as well.'

'Detective-Superintendent Mowbray has asked me for an interview. I will put the point to him tomorrow.'

'Think he'll tell you why he suspects murder?'

'Yes, I am sure he will.'

'Do you know something about this business which I don't know?'

'I think not, but I may suspect something which has not yet occurred to you.'

'Such as what?'

'Such as Professor Veryan's telescope.'

'Nobody has mentioned a telescope to me.'

'If he was an astronomer, a telescope seems necessary to complete the picture. The fact that it has not been mentioned could mean one of two things: either the police think it of no importance, or they think it of such significance that they are keeping it in the background until they feel the right moment has come to mention any evidence it can produce.'

'Suppose there wasn't a telescope at all?'

'Oh, but, surely, there must have been. Whatever his real purpose, he may have needed an excuse for visiting the keep at night. There was always the chance that Tom or Bonamy would wake and hear him and go up there to find out what was happening.'

'If it was murder and somebody tumbled him over the edge, the telescope would have flown out of his hand and gone down with him. I wonder whether it was the kind you hold up to your eye, or whether he had a tripod or something of that sort?'

'No doubt all will be revealed in due course.'

There was a telephone call for Dame Beatrice at breakfast on the following morning. Laura took it and said, 'Mrs Veryan is on the line and "craves the favour of an interview". What shall I tell her? She says she is at the Barbican with Tynant.'

'My appointment with Detective-Superintendent Mowbray is not until eleven. Tell her that I will see her here as soon as she can come along.'

Laura relayed this message, returned to the table and said, 'I wonder what she wants?'

'I would like to know whether she stands to gain anything in the way of money or property by her husband's death,' said Dame Beatrice. 'I believe there is some chance of it.'

'They were divorced.'

'That would not prevent her from inheriting anything he may have left to her in his will. I understand that the reasons for divorce were not acrimonious. The couple appear to have separated by mutual consent. It is quite likely that he has left her provided for.'

'Looks nasty for her if he has. That might be the foxy police reason for bringing her into the picture by getting her to identify the body.'

Mrs Veryan came at a quarter to ten in a car driven by Tynant. He remained in it while the interview took place. There were a couple of men reading newspapers in the hotel lounge, but, one after the other, they soon went out and Dame Beatrice, Laura and Grace had the room to themselves.

'You say you need my help,' said Dame Beatrice, 'but I am not yet officially connected with the case.'

'That is my trouble. Why is there a case? Why don't the police believe it was an accident?'

'It was a strange accident considering that he had been on the tower more than a dozen times before. That, and the

fact that the accident happened at the one time when there was nobody about, was bound to interest the police.'

'My trouble is that I believe I gain by the death, though I may not be the only person to do so. In fact, I believe that someone may gain from *my* death.'

'When did your husband publicly announce that he proposed to dig at Holdy Castle?' Dame Beatrice enquired.

'Oh, we kept in touch through mutual friends. I know he had had the project in mind for some time. I don't think he ever made what one would call a public announcement, but I have no doubt that he had spoken of it to his colleagues at the university and I know there was correspondence between him and the owner of the property. He was rather angry with the owner because permission was also given to Edward Saltergate for the work *he* wanted to do at the castle. Lilian Saltergate told me so, weeks ago.'

'Is Mrs Saltergate a friend of yours?'

'I would not call her a friend; she is an acquaintance only, but I like her well enough, although I suppose if we met three times at conferences or public dinners while I was married to Malpas it was as much as happened. We were attached to different universities, you see, and, in any case, Malpas, as a full professor, moved in a somewhat different sphere from Edward's.'

'Would you care to tell me the terms of your husband's will?'

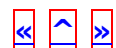
'I shall be glad to do that, when I am sure of them. But, although I may gain by his death, I have a perfect alibi, as you probably know.'

'Then why are you worried?'

'I dislike wagging tongues, that is all, and I am afraid the wrong person may be blamed for the accident to Malpas.'

9

Retractions and Explanations



Detective-Superintendent Mowbray turned up at the Seagull with the Chief Constable, so a party of four had mid-morning drinks in the cocktail bar and then Dame Beatrice and the Chief Constable, an old acquaintance, sat in deckchairs on the sands while Laura and Mowbray, in the hotel lounge, still empty on such a fine morning, discussed the visit of Mrs Veryan.

‘What did you make of her, Mrs Gavin?’

‘It wasn’t up to me to make anything of her. She was Dame B.’s pigeon. My impression is that she was in a bit of a flap.’

‘Perhaps she has cause to be, ma’am. She has asked for police protection.’

‘Good heavens, why?’

‘Says she fears for her life. Whoever pushed her husband off that tower – that is, if anybody did – might have it in for her, too, she thinks, and for the same reason.’

‘That being?’

‘It’s all right confiding in you, ma’am, what with Dame Beatrice and your husband’s position at Scotland Yard. The reason being, as usual, money. It seems that Professor Veryan was well heeled. I’ve been on to his lawyers and he leaves half his property in trust to his former wife to provide her with an income and the other half to archaeological research. In the event of her death, the lot goes to the archaeologists.’

‘Well, there’s safety in numbers. If he had left it to one particular archaeologist she might have a qualm or two, but under the circumstances—’

‘One particular archaeologist was named as being the leader of an expedition on which Professor Veryan seems to have set his heart and which was to follow this one at Holdy Castle.’

‘I suppose I had better not ask—’

‘Why not, Mrs Gavin? You, as much as Dame Beatrice, are one of us and discretion on your part is absolute as, over the years, the Force has come to know. Besides, it will come out sooner or later. The person named is, as you have guessed, I expect, Mr Tynant.’

‘Is there any chance that Tynant could convert the money to his own use instead of spending it on this expedition?’

‘I have no details, but I’m sure it is tied up tight enough. However, there is something which is making us think a bit. The Chief Constable will be talking it over with Dame Beatrice, so there is no reason why you should not hear it as well. Those precious alibis which everybody was only too ready to produce have all gone up in smoke.’

The Chief Constable was making the same statement, couched in different but no less expressive words, to Dame Beatrice. He had collected a selection of pebbles and he tossed them at intervals, one after another, as he talked.

‘We want you officially on this,’ he said, ‘in your capacity as psychiatric adviser to the Home Office. On the face of it, accidental death would seem the obvious conclusion for Mowbray to come to, but he had a very good reason for asking to have the inquest adjourned while he made further enquiries.’

‘It was clear there was something which did not satisfy him. May I hazard a guess? Could it have anything to do with Professor Veryan’s telescope?’

'Do you choose a cigar or a nice milky coconut? Do go on.'

'Fingerprints?'

'Hotter and hotter. Well?'

'I do not think anybody's fingerprints have been taken by the Detective-Superintendent's myrmidons, so my guess would be that there were no fingerprints on the telescope, neither Professor Veryan's nor those of anybody else.'

'How on earth do you do it?'

'No mention has been made publicly of the telescope, so I deduced that it might be either of no importance whatever or the very reverse, and the latter was the more interesting speculation.'

'Well, you are quite right, of course. Mowbray found the telescope at some distance from the body and his men automatically tested it for prints to check against those of the deceased whom they *did* fingerprint "just for practice", the detective-sergeant who did the job told us, and, to Mowbray's surprise and, I am bound to add, pleasure (for a case of wilful murder seldom comes his way) the telescope had been wiped quite clean. As this could not have been done by the dead man, unless, for some reason known only to himself, he did it before he died and then went to some trouble to keep the telescope untouched, it opened up an interesting avenue to explore.'

'Yes, indeed. And there is something more, is there not?'

'Yes, there is, and this is where we need your help.'

Nearly everybody who pleaded an alibi for the night of Professor Veryan's death has retracted it. The exceptions are the two lads Monkswood and Hassocks, but *exceptions* is not a viable expression in their case, since they produced no convincing alibi in the first place.'

'That is so. The rest of your statement is of the greatest interest. What do you suggest that I should do?'

'Go through the lot of them with a small-tooth comb. Deal with the nits and, with any luck, you may find us a bug

or two.'

'I cannot congratulate you upon your choice of metaphor, but your meaning is plain. Why do you think the members of the party have changed their previous statements?'

'Well, I think you may compliment yourself on that. We believe it was your appearance on the scene which caused panic in the henhouse. Anyway, confessions and retractions have been pouring in and we can do with all the help you can give us.'

'You would like me to interview them all?'

'The whole boiling, if you will, and one after one, as my great-aunt used to put it. I expect they'll kick a bit, but no doubt you're used to that kind of reaction.'

'My private patients are all volunteers, but this is scarcely a private matter. Very well, I will do as you ask. Is there any way of keeping them segregated until I have seen them all?'

'I'll tell Mowbray to see to that. We don't want them swapping news and views until you've finished with them. The easiest way to make sure they can't get together is to hold the interviews at the police station. Would you object to that?'

'Certainly not, in principle; in practice, however, there is the difficulty that I have no idea how long each interview may take. We can scarcely lock them in separate police cells for the night. However, we must hope for the best. What are Mrs Veryan's plans? She will have to be one of my victims, I suppose, although I have already seen her.'

'You might like to see her first, then.'

'Very well. After that I should like the others in this order: my godson, Miss Priscilla, Mrs Saltergate, Tom Hassocks, Miss Fiona, Mr Tynant, Dr Lochlure, Mr Saltergate.'

The Chief Constable wrote the names in a column, showed them to her and then mentioned the two workmen.

‘I do not intend to talk to them at present,’ she said. ‘Later on I may see them, but only if all other approaches fail.’

‘Oh, I agree. It is most unlikely that they can contribute anything. Whatever Saltergate may have said to Veryan (and vice versa) would not have been said in front of the men.’

Nobody else but Laura was present at the interviews. She was there to take shorthand notes and was placed at a table a little apart from Dame Beatrice and whoever Dame Beatrice was questioning.

Grace Veryan this time was composed and businesslike. She said she had been told that everybody was to be interviewed and that she was afraid she was going to be of very little help as a source of information. No, she had no idea that Malpas had been interested in astronomy. He must have taken it up after they had parted. He had never mentioned it when they met.

‘How often did you meet?’ Dame Beatrice enquired. ‘I assume that you refer to meetings after the divorce.’

‘Oh, off and on, quite a number of times. It was always when other people were present, but we had many mutual friends and we made it clear that neither of us would find it in the least embarrassing to meet at their houses. There was no animosity between us. As a matter of fact, Malpas asked me to join him on this dig, but I had already accepted Martha Gwent’s invitation to cruise on her yacht.’

‘Would you have joined him but for that?’

‘No. I should have found another excuse.’

‘Professor Veryan died on Sunday night. When did you say you heard the news?’

‘Not until first thing on Tuesday morning.’

‘Will you ask the policeman on the door to send my godson Monkswood in?’

Bonamy was on his best behaviour. He called his godmother “Dame Beatrice” throughout the interview, sat

up straight in his chair, did not so much as glance in Laura's direction and had even put on a formal suit and a tie.

'Now, then,' said Dame Beatrice briskly, 'I have others to see, so let us despatch you and yours in as short a time as possible. You appear to have no alibi for the night of the murder.'

'Murder? So it's called that openly, is it?'

'Do you care to amend your previous statement?'

'No, I don't think so. Why should I?'

'First, because it may not be the truth.'

'Oh, look, Dame Beatrice! I mean - well, I say! You don't think I'd lie to the police!'

'Second, because you are exposing yourself to a certain amount of suspicion and, in any case, are not following the general trend if you do not supply me with a better story.'

'I can't help that.'

'I suppose a girl is involved.'

'Oh, well, dammit, no! You mustn't take any notice of that blighter Tom.'

'I am sure that she would prefer to be involved in what might be called her private capacity, than in the full glare of a public appearance in the witness-box.'

Bonamy took his time. He stared thoughtfully at the table-top, looked across at his godmother, looked down again and then laughed.

'No, Dame Beatrice,' he said, 'you don't bluff me like that. I'm sticking to what I said. I cruised around with Tom, we slept in the tent or in the car and we finished up on the Sunday night in your paddock. We went for breakfast at the William Rufus in your village and landed ourselves on you for lunch.'

'And that is still your story?'

'That is still my story, Dame Beatrice.'

'Very well. Ask Miss Yateley to come in.'

Priscilla, given the chair which Bonamy had vacated, took off her spectacles, blinked nervously at Dame Beatrice, put them on again and said, 'All right, I'll come clean. No, I didn't go to my friends. I went to London.'

'Yes? Why was that?'

'I wanted some fun.'

'Did you get it?'

'No.'

'Did you go with Miss Broadmayne?'

'No. I went alone by train on the Friday evening. I got beastly drunk on Saturday evening and spent the night in the waiting-room at the station. I came back on the first train on Monday morning.'

'Sunday is the important day, so far as this enquiry is concerned.'

'I had Sunday breakfast in the station restaurant and then I joined a march. Some marchers took me home with them and we all spent the night on the floor of the house where they were squatting.'

'Where was this?'

'Somewhere in Battersea, I think. I crept out at first light on Monday and caught a workmen's bus to Paddington and Fiona was waiting for me with Tom's car at this end, so we came back to the caravan together, as we had arranged.'

'I see. What made you decide to change your story?'

'I didn't want to embarrass my friends at the farm. They would either have had to tell lies for me or to have given away the fact that I did not visit them. When we first knew of Professor Veryan's death it never occurred to any of us that one of our party might be blamed for it, so I suppose we all told the police what we *ought* to have been doing instead of what we actually *did* do. We had no idea that our statements would be challenged, especially by anybody like you, but now I expect the truth will come out because we are all scared.'

'Not always a state of mind in which truth prevails. Thank you, Miss Yateley. Please ask for Mrs Saltergate.'

Lilian came straight to the point.

'I was on the top of the keep with Malpas from about ten o'clock until eleven-thirty,' she said. 'When I left him up there he was alive and well.'

'Can you prove that?'

'No, I cannot, but I assure you it was so.'

'Are you interested in astronomy?'

'To the extent that every intelligent person is interested in it. After all, one lives in the Space Age.'

'Did the suggestion that you should join him come from Professor Veryan or yourself?'

'From me, of course, prompted by Edward. Edward wanted an hour in which to survey the trench without interruption.'

'So you were a decoy.'

'Yes, and a peace-offering after the quarrel. Anyhow, I managed to find a number of stars and planets which necessitated Malpas's having to look away from the outer bailey and answer my questions.'

'Could your husband carry out a survey in the dark?'

'Certainly not. He had two storm lanterns on iron rods which could be fixed in the ground and a very powerful electric torch. The conditions were not ideal, but at least he had uninterrupted access to the excavation without Malpas's being down there.'

'Can you prove that you left the keep at approximately eleven-thirty?'

'I think so. We had told the hotel porter that we should be back late, but before midnight, and he was there, ready to lock up, when we went in. I am sure he will remember.'

Tom came next.

'They don't let us communicate with the people you've spoken to,' he said, 'so I have no idea what Bonamy has said. Has he displayed gentlemanly feelings?'

'I suppose that, as the unusual occupants were not there, you two slept in the caravan on that Sunday night.'

'Oh, Lord! So Bonamy *has* let the cat out of the bag!'

'No, he told me nothing. Foolish of him and due only, I fancy, to the misplaced sense of chivalry you have queried. Who were the two girls?'

'If he didn't tell you, I don't understand how you know.'

'Perhaps because, like Campbell of Kilmhor, I have a large experience of life, and that means of human nature. I will add another remark made by Campbell in that immortal one-act play. He said that, speaking out of his experience, he had decided that only fools and the dead never change their minds. I hope you have changed yours, Tom, and are prepared, as Laura would put it, to come clean. I want to clear you two boys out of the way.'

'We can't land the girls in a mess. They were great sports.'

'A term I would hesitate to attach to Miss Priscilla and Miss Fiona, so I deduce that they are not the girls in question.'

'These were two girls who are staying at the pub in Stint Magna where Bonamy and I take our refreshment. Students from London University on holiday while they do some reading. We paved the way with gin and conversation – the pub doesn't run to vodka – and when we settled for this weekend off duty we collected them up, took them round and about and bedded them down in the caravan. We drove them back to the pub in time to have breakfast on the Monday morning, and then we drove over to you at the Stone House for lunch. When we got back in the afternoon the caravan and my car had been moved and we heard what had happened to Vervan.'

'I will not be so indiscreet as to ask who bedded down with whom, but do I understand that, if it ever came to what Laura calls the crunch, your alibis could stand up to the strictest investigation?'

‘Our alibis, well, it would depend how broadminded people are. But, I say, you won’t involve the girls if you can help it, will you? I mean, it was all a bit of innocent fun and, by God! – we needed it after all that slog, and, anyway, we didn’t sleep with them.’

‘Ask Miss Broadmayne to come in, please.’

Unlike her predecessors, Fiona was defiant to the point of belligerence.

‘So why shouldn’t I?’ she demanded.

‘Why shouldn’t you do what, my dear?’

‘Take Susannah home with me for the weekend.’

‘So long as your parents did not object—’

‘They couldn’t. They weren’t there. I knew the house would be empty. It was a chance to get Susannah to myself for a bit.’

‘Is that why Miss Yateley went to London and got drunk?’

‘No. She’s now got a “thing” for Tom Hassocks but, of course, Tom and Bonamy had their own fish to fry and when they offered me Tom’s car free of charge for three days – I’ve been renting it, you know – in exchange for the caravan for three nights, I asked Susannah if she would mind if I lent them my key.’

‘Three nights? Not merely for Sunday night? But never mind. Did your weekend with Dr Lochlure come up to expectations?’

‘No, of course not. Things never do, in my experience. We found we had nothing to say to one another.’

‘I am sorry the guilt fell off the gingerbread.’

‘There was never a chance of anything else. When, near the end of term, Susannah sent for me and asked me whether I would like to join in this castle thing, she made it perfectly clear that she was choosing me only because I have big muscles and don’t snore.’

‘The former are obvious and I congratulate you on them. How did she know about the latter?’

‘Some water came through the ceiling of my room at college, so for three nights running I occupied the settee in her sitting-room.’

‘Is she well liked by the college?’

‘She’s out of place there, in a way. You stop listening to her lectures and concentrate on her looks. If she doesn’t take you that way, you write her off as a bitch and don’t bother to attend her lectures at all. She’s a frightfully dull talker.’

‘You speak for the Junior Common Room. What about the Seniors?’

‘Mixed, like us, I guess. Of course, she never lacks a lecture room full of *men* students. Anyway, the weekend was a disaster and I’m pretty sure the mouse was a put-up job. I mean, we never have had mice in my home. She made it an excuse to telephone Tynant. He came at once and took her away. After that, I was alone in the house and drove myself back to Castle Holdy early on Monday morning.’

‘So you still have no alibi for the time of Professor Veryan’s death.’

‘Why should I need one? If I could have broken *Nicholas Tynant*’s neck, that would have been a different thing. I had nothing whatever against Professor Veryan.’

‘I suppose you have discussed his death with the others?’

‘Not a lot. I don’t see that there is anything to discuss. I can’t see any reason for adjourning the inquest when it’s perfectly obvious what must have happened.’

‘Tell me about the mouse.’

‘There wasn’t one. I knew Susannah wasn’t pleased when I introduced her to an empty house. She said she had been looking forward to meeting my parents again. They had been to college and met her and I had not told her they would be away. I’m afraid I didn’t consider her at all. All I thought about was getting her to myself without Priscilla. Three is a very unmanageable number, don’t you think?’

‘Four is a more agreeable one. Did you and Priscilla never think of teaming up with Bonamy and Tom?’

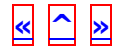
‘Those baby boys? Anyway, they had picked up two girls at that pub they go to and, in any case, I don’t think we were their cup of tea any more than they were ours. No, there wasn’t any mouse. Su wanted an excuse to have Nicholas come to the house and take her away. I’m sure they spent the next nights in the same bed, although you’ll never get them to admit it. I was an awful fool. I can see now that she only came with me to my home so that she could throw dust in the Saltergates’ eyes. She meant all along to spend the weekend with Nicholas.’

‘And you spent the time alone when she had gone?’

‘Oh, yes. I got some paint and emulsion on Saturday and spent the whole of Sunday redecorating my bedroom. Rather fun, actually. Thank God there’s always something one can do.’

10

Edward, Nicholas and Susannah



Well!’ said Laura when, the door having closed behind Fiona, nobody else had been summoned. ‘What do we make of that lot? Their new alibis don’t seem of any more use than their old ones.’

‘Nor, perhaps, much nearer the truth, but we shall see. I will change my mind about the sequence of our visitors. I will see Edward Saltergate next.’ Laura went to the door and asked the policeman to summon him. Edward entered and was seated. Laura closed the door and went back to her chair at the smaller table.

‘Well,’ said Edward, ‘I would like to know what my wife has told you before I answer any questions.’

‘Why do you think the police are going to so much trouble to keep those who have been interviewed completely segregated from those who have not, so far, entered this room?’ asked Dame Beatrice.

‘I have no idea. It seems a totally unnecessary proceeding.’

‘A man has died mysteriously, Mr Saltergate.’

‘There is no evidence of any mystery.’

‘Oh, but do you think I would be here in my official capacity if there were no evidence of it? There is a very strong presumption indeed that Professor Veryan was murdered. I am not at liberty to give away information which is known to the police, but you may take my word for it that they now have suspicions that the death may not have been an accident. You stated that you spent the

Sunday night in question at the Horse and Cart hotel with your wife. Do you wish to enlarge upon that statement?’

‘Enlarge upon it?’ Edward’s expression changed. He ceased to look like an affronted sheep and merely blinked at Dame Beatrice before resuming his usual appearance of giving courteous attention to the person with whom he was in conversation. ‘No. You have told me what I wanted to know. Veryan’s death was no accident.’

‘To you I hardly needed to put it into words.’

‘You flatter me, indeed you do. If what you tell me is true (and I am certain it is), I suppose I must be the chief suspect.’

‘Why should you suppose that? Good gracious me! If every time two eminent scholars fell out, the result was the murder of one of them by the other, we should soon be very short of first-class brains. Co-operate with me, please, and let us have a true picture of how you spent that Sunday evening and night.’

‘Very well. So far as the night itself is concerned, my previous story needs no alteration. From midnight onwards I was in bed. What I did not disclose and what I had suggested to my wife that she did not mention, was how we spent the later part of the evening.’

‘Why did you want to conceal what you did?’ ‘Because I was ashamed of it and ashamed of having involved Lilian. I acted the despicable part of a spy and persuaded my wife to assist me.’

‘Did you find out anything to your advantage?’

‘I confirmed my impression that the completion of Veryan’s trench must inevitably ruin the foundations of one of my flanking-towers. I also satisfied myself that, if one of his secondary burials had been under the land on which my wall and flanking-towers were built, all trace of it would have been lost when the castle’s outer defences were erected.’

'So what becomes of his insistence to complete his trench?'

'Were he – had he been a mean-minded man, I would put it down to sheer cussedness and a determination to make a thorough nuisance of himself, but Malpas, although cussed, was not mean or small-minded. I think he had some reason for completing the circle of his trench which he did not disclose to me.'

'Can you guess what it was?'

'No, I can think of nothing. I have approached Tynant on the matter, but he can offer no explanation. As perhaps you know, he has agreed to extend the trench away from my wall and towers and to give up his excavation short of the tower which is in jeopardy.'

'At what time did you and your wife return to your hotel?'

'Oh, between eleven-thirty and midnight. The porter can tell you. I had asked him to stay up and let us in.'

'Thank you, Mr Saltergate. Will you ask for Mr Tynant?'

'Well!' said Laura, when Edward had gone.

'Yes,' agreed Dame Beatrice, 'it begins to look as though Mr Saltergate can be eliminated.'

'I thought the opposite. With Veryan out of the way, Tynant is prepared to play ball. It was very much to Saltergate's advantage to get rid of Veryan.'

'Time will show what happened. When Mr Tynant comes in, I want you to disappear. Do not return unless I send for you.'

'You think he may have some deep, dark secrets to disclose?'

'I think that he and possibly Dr Lochlure will speak more freely in your absence than in your (or anybody else's) presence. There, I think, he comes.' Laura slid out as Tynant entered. 'Ah, Mr Tynant, I believe you would like to amend the story you told to the police,' said Dame Beatrice urbanely.

Nicholas hitched up the knees of his impeccable trousers and seated himself.

'I wouldn't like to,' he said, 'but I suppose I must. What do you want – a love story?'

'That would be most agreeable and would pass the time at our disposal very pleasantly.'

'But it wouldn't be what you're here for.'

'Who can tell? Commence. I am all agog.'

'You will have to tell me where to begin.'

'How long have you known Dr Lochlure?'

'On and off, for about two years.'

'Why haven't you married her?'

'Lack of filthy lucre. You can't expect a girl like her to settle for a cottage and live on home-grown potatoes.'

'And your own tastes,' said Dame Beatrice, with an eye on his beautiful clothes, 'do not run that way, either.'

'Look, I know better than to fence with you, Dame Beatrice. You want me to confess that, with Veryan out of the way, I stand a good chance of being offered the chair of archaeology at my university. Very well, I admit it. They can hardly pass me over. All the same, I didn't kill him and I can't tell you who did.'

'Ignoring the fact that I have had your story already from the police, will you tell me, in as much relevant detail as you think fit, exactly how you spent the weekend of Professor Veryan's death?'

'I can't, without involving Susannah.'

'Then by all means involve her. When I release you, I shall talk to her. She will have every chance of refuting your statements, should she think it well to do so. Remember, too, that only those indiscretions which lead to crime are of any interest to the police and, in this case, to me. They and I pool all our information, you know.'

'I know I am high on the list of suspects. At least, I shall be if the police can ever prove that Malpas Veryan was murdered. But, if I caused his death, should I confess so

freely that, because of it, I have every prospect of stepping into his shoes?’

‘And, I understand, of having half his fortune for a research project. There was no need for you to confess to something which is bound to be common knowledge very soon. Do tell me what was behind the story of the mouse.’

‘What story of what mouse?’

‘The mouse which provided you with an excuse to remove Dr Lochlure from Miss Broadmayne’s home.’

‘Sorry, but I have no idea what you’re talking about. Is this another version of the Isle of Man’s talking mongoose?’

‘I still hope that you will give me an account of how you spent the Friday, Saturday and Sunday, especially the Sunday night on which Professor Veryan died.’

‘I have already given a full account to the police.’

‘I am still wondering whether you would care to alter that statement in any way?’

‘No, I wouldn’t. Whether it is exactly accurate or not is beside the point. It’s a good story and I don’t propose to depart from it. It doesn’t matter what young Fiona has told you. I am not risking Susannah’s reputation by admitting that I slept with her.’

‘Although you did. Very well, Mr Tynant. Please ask for Dr Lochlure to come in.’

‘I insist upon hearing the questions you put to her.’

‘If she has no objection, neither have I.’

‘You mean that?’

‘Please ask the policeman on duty to send her in.’

Nicholas walked to the door. There was a short colloquy at the end of which Susannah, raising her voice a little, said, ‘Certainly not. Listeners hear no good of themselves. I shall see Dame Beatrice alone, as everybody else has done. Do you want tongues to wag even more than they’re wagging already? Don’t be tiresome.’ With that, she entered the room and shut the door.

'Ah,' said Dame Beatrice, 'I am glad to know that you can manage your men.'

'Men? In the plural? You flatter me, Dame Beatrice.'

'I think not, unless all but one of the male sex are blind. Would you prefer to have my secretary sit in on our conference?'

'You are such an intimidating inquisitor that I rather think I *would* like to have someone else present. May I ask her to come in? She is in the corridor.'

'Please. Well, now, do I understand that there are certain aspects of your story which you wish to amend?'

'You know, Dame Beatrice, I do think this is rather unfair. You hear everybody else's account and then you ask me for mine. Suppose mine does not tally with what you have been told already? What are you going to think?'

'That someone is lying, but that the someone need not be yourself.'

'I suppose Fiona Broadmayne has been making mischief.'

'She certainly gave a somewhat different picture of her weekend from the one she gave to the police. I shall be glad to have your version.'

'Oh, well, if I must! Fiona invited me to spend the weekend at her home. I had met her parents and naturally I expected them to be there when we arrived. I was surprised and, I must confess, very much annoyed when I discovered that she and I were to spend the weekend alone together, particularly as I had already had to decline an invitation from a friend because I had promised Fiona. Under the circumstances I saw no reason why I should let myself in for an intolerably boring weekend, so, when I discovered that I had been taken to a house which had not even a servant in it to prepare the meals, I telephoned the Barbican hotel.'

'And the ever-attentive Mr Tynant rescued Childe Rolanda from the dark tower. What is the story of the

mouse? Surely you will tell me.'

'Oh, that! I helped Fiona get tea ready – she had brought with her various stores to last the weekend – and then I was in a quandary. I wanted a reason for insisting upon taking my departure before nightfall without giving her the crude explanation which would have been the true one, so, in desperation, I invented the mouse and insisted that I am so allergic to rodents that I could not possibly stay in a house which harboured them.'

'She did not believe your story.'

'No, I don't think she did. There was a stormy scene and at the end of it I rang Nicholas Tynant, knowing that I could catch him before he went fishing on the Saturday, and asked him to come in his car and collect me.'

'His, I take it, was the invitation you had had to refuse.'

'Yes, it was. When I had to turn it down, he said he was going to spend the Saturday fishing.'

'But the two of you spent the weekend in the other hotel here in Holdy Bay.'

'In separate rooms, as the chambermaid can certify.'

'Of course, and you booked separately and in your own names.'

'Certainly. There was no reason to do otherwise.'

'We now come to the heart of the matter. Will you give me an account of how you spent the night on which Professor Veryan died?'

'It will not differ in any particular from the one I have given to the police.'

'Are you sure you will not change your mind?'

Susannah got up from the table.

'Have you finished with me?' she asked.

'Not quite. Please sit down again. Tell me exactly what you did after dinner on that Sunday evening.'

'You are trying to find discrepancies in my story. There may be some slight alterations, but absolutely nothing of any significance.'

‘Did you know that your caravan was occupied during your absence?’

‘Fiona told me that the two boys, Bonamy and Tom, wanted to borrow the key, so I assumed they slept there.’

‘Did you raise any objection?’

‘No, I don’t think so. They promised to leave everything perfectly tidy. Besides, I was – oh, well, never mind that.’

‘Besides, you were not so invulnerable yourself that you could afford to question the behaviour of your juniors.’

‘Oh, they had girls with them, had they?’

‘And you had Nicholas Tynant with you.’

‘I did not! I did not! – in the sense you mean.’

‘You may be asked to swear to that in a court of law, and that might come very hard on Mr Tynant. He does not appear to have much of an alibi for the Sunday night. You had better give him any help you can, for your own sake, as well as his.’

‘How dare you threaten me!’

‘That is not a threat; it is a friendly warning. I cannot disclose matters which, so far, are known only to myself and the police, but there is no longer any doubt in their minds that Professor Veryan was murdered.’

Susannah’s face registered no emotion. All she said was that she had not realised that there had been so much bad feeling among the party.

‘For, of course,’ she added, ‘it must have been one of us. Nobody else would have known he was up on top of the tower.’

‘I would still like to have an account of your own Sunday evening.’

‘Well, I had no idea, and neither had Nicholas, that we would need an alibi. We agreed that it might be better if we did not arrive together on the Monday morning, so we arranged that he would take me to the caravan after dinner on Sunday night but that he would leave me to turn the boys out, if they were there, while he sneaked off and spent

the rest of the night at the Barbican. He had told Malpas he was going to spend Saturday and Sunday fishing and this would have been true if I had not telephoned him to take me away from Fiona's home on the Friday while he was still at the Barbican. Malpas would have suspected nothing when Nicholas came down to breakfast on the Monday morning, you see. He would have concluded that Nicholas had returned from his fishing-trip while he was still on the tower on Sunday night. Of course, everything went wrong when the car broke down at Holdy Bay.'

'I think I must see Mr Tynant again. Will you ask the policeman to recall him?'

Nicholas came in jauntily.

'This is an unexpected honour,' he said. 'I concluded that you had finished with me. Has Susannah been ruining my reputation?'

'Far from it. She has dismissed you without a stain on your character.'

'I hope you didn't believe her. If she had been right, you would see me in a very poor light. I have already indicated that I slept with her. I hope you are not expecting details.'

'Of another kind and on another matter. In your first statement you said that, soon after leaving Holdy Bay after dinner on the Sunday night, your car broke down and you were obliged to escort Dr Lochlure back to the hotel. If the breakdown was of such a nature that you could not cope with it yourself, how were the repairs done so quickly? Your car, I understand, was back at the Barbican on the Monday when Professor Veryan's body was found.'

'Oh, after I left Susannah at the hotel I went to the all-night garage in Holdy Bay and told them where to pick up the car and where to deliver it when they had put right whatever was wrong. They knew me because I've had dealings with them before, and I made a special point that I needed the car urgently.'

‘I see. And the rest of your story, the long walk back to the Barbican, the waiting for the outdoor domestic staff to turn up—’

‘Perfectly true.’

‘Thank you, Mr Tynant. Is it also true that you have come to an agreement with Mr Saltergate and that the argument about the trench is settled?’

‘Oh, yes. Malpas was very stiff-necked about the completion of our trench, but, as Saltergate points out, any secondary burial under his walls would most likely have been destroyed when the walls and towers were built. All the bad blood has now been drained away.’

‘Perhaps an unfortunate choice of words, considering all the circumstances.’

‘Well, Beatrice, can you give Mowbray a lead?’ asked the Chief Constable.

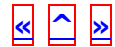
‘I can advise him to find the two girl students who shared bed and board in the caravan with my godson and young Tom Hassocks.’

‘Aha. Who are they and how can they help?’

‘I don’t know that they can, but there is just the chance that they may be able to confirm the approximate time of Professor Veryan’s death. The medical evidence was not conclusive on that point. They can also give the young men an alibi if they were with them in the caravan when Malpas Veryan was killed. Personally I am not at all sure that they were – not so far as the Sunday night was concerned, at any rate.’

11

Private and Other Conversations



What makes you think the girls whom the two men students picked up can help with establishing the time of death, ma'am?' asked Mowbray.

'Well, most of the adults have taken it for granted that the caravan was empty at the time of Professor Veryan's death. It now appears that the young people may have slept in it on all three nights of that weekend. The young men heard nothing, so I think they were in my paddock, as they claimed, but there is just the chance that one of the girls may have heard Veryan cry out as he fell, particularly if the fall was involuntary.'

'Even if one of the girls did hear something, ma'am, it won't help unless she looked at her watch at the time, but it's worth a try.'

'You said you had finished that sonnet of yours,' remarked Fiona.

'Oh, yes. I don't think it will do for my collected works, but I still think it's too good for the college magazine. Do you want to read it?'

'No. You read it aloud to me.'

'Very few poets do justice to their own work when they read it aloud.'

'Betjeman does.'

'My father says de la Mare didn't. He once heard him and Edith Evans read his work alternately.'

'Never mind that. Have a bash.' Fiona stretched herself on the sands. The poet gave a preliminary cough. 'Here

goes, then,' she said. 'No rude comments.'

'Of course not; nothing but admiration. Has it got a title?'

'No. I simply call it *Sonnet*. It goes:

*'Put out the light and be my body's balm.
I have more need of you than you of me;
But at the hearts of maelstroms there is
calm -
The endless patience of Eternity;
And so, though fine the line 'twixt love and
lust,
Fear you no ill nor any purpose dire,
For in the end, dear heart, we are but dust,
The residue of Love's consuming fire.
Too soon the all-impatient dawn will break,
And, with it, Night's sweet symphony be
mute,
So, while we have the time, let Orpheus
make
A music with his lyre and Pan his flute.
Put out the light. Let Eros have his way.
Minds invent lies, but bodies never may.'*

'Hm!' said Fiona, raising herself on one elbow. 'A bit derivative, isn't it?'

'I don't see how that can be avoided. One reads so many things that, in the end, it becomes very difficult to sort out what is original from what one has unconsciously absorbed.'

'That last line isn't true, anyway. Look at prostitutes and gigolos and those sort of seedy adventurers who make love to silly rich women for their money and marry them.'

'The line belongs in the context. I wasn't thinking about prostitutes and gigolos and seedy adventurers.'

'You know I'm likely to find myself in trouble, don't you? - about Veryan's death I mean,' said Fiona.

‘That smooth-talking policeman made it plain. He knows you spent the weekend alone in an empty house, but, after all, I told him I spent it with people I couldn’t possibly identify. Anyhow, you have to have a motive for murder and neither of us had any reason to kill Professor Veryan.’

‘I read somewhere that the police don’t bother all that much about motives. What they go for are means and opportunity.’

‘Well, I suppose you had the means and we both had the opportunity. I can’t prove I was in London and you can’t prove you spent Sunday night at home.’

‘I had the means? What means?’

‘Well, I’ve been turning things over in my mind. I have a strong visual imagination and I think I can see what happened on that tower.’

‘So can everybody else. The coping is very low and is broken away and Veryan was a tall man. Somebody gave him a shove and over he went.’

‘You couldn’t be sure that would happen. People standing on their feet have a lot of resistance to a push or shove. I have thought of a much better way.’

‘Then I wouldn’t tell that detective, if I were you.’

‘I don’t think it would work in my case; I’m not big enough or strong enough, but an average person could do it.’

‘Which average person do you have in mind?’

‘Nobody in particular.’

‘Come on! You can trust me.’

‘Can I? Susannah Lochlure couldn’t. You let her think your parents would be at home, and that she would go riding and play golf and there might be a small, select dance on the Saturday night. It’s no use denying it. I heard you. You must have known you were lying to her.’

‘Will you give me a copy of that sonnet? I like it very much. May I have it?’

'Yes, of course. All right, then, the average person in my mind is Edward Saltergate.'

'And the method?'

'I envisage Veryan seated on the broken wall with both hands holding his telescope to his eye. You know the way he always sat leaning right back with his knees together—'

'And his hands clasped behind the back of his head—'

'In this case holding the telescope, as I say. Well, all the average person would have to do is to make a swift dive at his legs, get him behind the knees and tumble him over backwards. He could not possibly save himself.'

'There are two objections to your choosing Saltergate.'

'He's the one with a motive.'

'I thought we agreed that motive was of secondary importance. I can pick holes in your theory. For one thing, you couldn't be certain that your method would kill a person. It might only injure him and then he could testify against you. My other objection is that, as soon as anybody else climbed the tower, Veryan would automatically lower the telescope and certainly would not be taken by surprise. In fact, if the visitor was Saltergate and he came by night, I'm sure Veryan would have been on the alert and very suspicious.'

'He despised Edward. He would not have been afraid of him. Then, once Edward had done the job, you see, he could have got down from the tower, picked up Veryan's head and smashed it down on that pile of stones to make sure.'

'I had no idea you were so bloodthirsty.'

'All poets are bloodyminded. Didn't you know?'

'More work for the police, then,' said Mowbray. 'I'll send my sergeant. He's a lady-killer and a snake in the grass. I have faith in his future. He should go far.'

Detective-Sergeant Harrow sought out Bonamy who, with Tom, was filling in a narrow causeway over the trench so that it could be crossed and another row of pegs

inserted in order that a second trench inside the first one could be dug when the two workmen had finished their present assignment.

‘Can you spare a minute? I’ve orders from Mr Mowbray,’ he said. The young men straightened their backs. ‘He wants the names of the two young ladies you have been in the habit of dating since you’ve been here. We have the name of the pub you frequent.’

‘Oh, Lord! Dame Beatrice has blown the gaff on us!’ said Tom. ‘Look here, Virginia and Sarah had nothing whatever to do with this rotten business. They’ve never so much as met anybody here except ourselves. You are not going to badger them.’

‘Far from it, I assure you, sir. The top brass are just clearing the dead wood out of the case. Our only concern is to make sure of your alibi for the time of the murder. You see, so far as our information goes, you and these young ladies were the only persons actually here at the castle at the time of Professor Veryan’s death. Mr and Mrs Saltergate were in the village, but not, of course, at the castle. All we need is confirmation that you and the ladies were actually in the caravan on that Sunday night. Once that has been established, we can eliminate you from our list of suspects. Have they surnames?’

‘We didn’t bother about surnames. We knew them as Virginia and Sarah.’

‘Nor they, sir?’

‘They knew us as Tom and Bonamy. No names, no packdrill. It was just one of these holiday pick-ups, you know.’

‘And enjoyed by all, I have no doubt, sir. I envy you.’

‘Why? Think of Starsky and Hutch. Look at that Greek Romeo Kojak. The police have all the opportunities.’

‘I have nothing to learn from American police methods, sir. So far as my duties are concerned, stuffed shirt is my middle name.’

‘OK, so no muscling in on our preserves,’ said Tom, eyeing the handsome young sergeant with little favour.

‘No such luck, sir.’

The landlord of the public house in Stint Magna knew Harrow and greeted the sergeant with resignation.

‘Don’t tell me my ladies have been getting into mischief,’ he said.

‘You’ve read about the death of Professor Veryan at Holdy Castle, I suppose, Sam?’

‘Very unfortunate, that. Shows how careful people ought to be, climbing about on ruins.’

‘Yes. Did your ladies sleep here on that Sunday night?’

‘No, nor on the Friday and Saturday neither. Paid their bills – I charge by the week – on the Friday morning, told me they wouldn’t be back till the Monday and had a midday snack and a drink with two young fellers been coming here regular, and then went gallivantin’ off with them. Not much call to ask how they spent the weekend, I reckon. Lady students they may be, but larky as they come. Oh, well, you’re only young once.’

‘Where are they now?’

‘Sunbathin’ and studyin’ out on my back lawn. It ain’t overlooked and we gives ’em warning of opening time so’s they can get their shorts and shirts on over their bikinis and come respectable into the bar.’

‘Call them in now.’

‘It wants half an hour.’

‘I haven’t got half an hour to mess about. Besides, I want to talk to them before those young fellows get here.’

‘That won’t be yet awhile. What’s the big idea?’

‘Orders from up top. That’s all I know.’

‘OK. Get ’em in the back way, Dilly. Tell ’em it’s the police and they better look slippy.’

Virginia and Sarah proved to be long-legged, attractive hoydens, well up to the exacting standards which Tom, at

any rate, set for the women of his fancy. They eyed the sergeant with approval.

‘The fuzz gets scrummier and scrummier,’ said Virginia, when she had introduced herself by this name.

‘And crumbier and crumbier,’ said Sarah. ‘Just look at this innocent boy!’

‘You’re welcome to do that as long as you want,’ said Harrow, ‘but, while you’re doing it, I have to ask you a few questions concerning the death at Holdy Castle.’

‘Not guilty, me lud,’ said Virginia.

‘You were in a caravan parked just below the ruins of Holdy Castle when the death occurred, and two young men whom you knew as Bonamy and Tom were with you.’

‘But the two boys weren’t. We spent Friday afternoon and Saturday and Sunday all day together, but when it came to bedtime they chickened out on us, even though we assured them we were on the pill.’

‘Look, ladies, this is a very serious matter. The inquest has been adjourned because there is some evidence – not much, but some – that Professor Veryan was murdered. I do ask you, for your own sakes, not to play games. Do you swear that you were alone in the caravan on the nights in question?’

‘Yes,’ said Virginia. ‘They done us wrong – in reverse.’

‘We was stood up,’ said Sarah, copying her friend’s flippant tone; then she caught Harrow’s eye and became serious. ‘It wasn’t very flattering,’ she said.

‘But you yourselves definitely were in the caravan on that Sunday night?’

‘We were hardly likely to have crawled back here to Uncle Sam and Aunt Dilly and ask for our beds back because our favours had been rejected,’ said Virginia. ‘The boys brought us back first thing on Monday morning, as promised, and our wounded feelings could not survive in the face of their contrition for having let us down.’

‘None of that matters very much, miss. I now come to a leading question and you, being educated ladies, will recognise it as such and will not be tempted into making any false statements concerning it.’

‘Oh, Lord! I know what’s coming. That drunken bellowing,’ said Sarah. ‘Very unpleasant.’

‘What time was this, and which night?’

‘The Sunday night, at about half-past eleven.’

‘Bellowing? Not a single shout?’

‘No. There was quite a bit of it. It sounded like a first-class row, and it was too close to be pleasant. I got up and locked the door of the caravan and closed the windows. It made the place horribly stuffy, but if there is one thing I bar it’s people who are fighting drunk.’

‘Are you sure of the time, miss?’

‘Yes, I’ve got a luminous watch.’

‘What made you look at it?’

‘I said to Virginia that surely the pubs had closed long before, and that made me look at my watch.’

‘Of course we were there,’ said Tom. ‘Do you impugn our virility?’

‘No, only your veracity, sir,’ said Mowbray. ‘Sergeant Harrow is convinced that the young ladies were telling him the truth. He sums them up as the last types who would have denied sleeping around, if sleep around they did. He asserts that they were humiliated and distressed by what they saw as your unchivalrous behaviour.’

‘The world has turned itself upside down,’ said Tom, ‘so what’s the use? We never dreamed you’d be swine enough to question the girls.’

‘Pigs is the word for us, not swine, sir,’ said Mowbray, with an avuncular smile.

‘So our alibi has gone up in smoke.’

‘According to Dame Beatrice, you are not the only liars in your party, sir. She is far from satisfied with the interviews she had, although, strangely enough, she was

inclined to accept your own story. Just as a matter of interest, may I ask why you let the young ladies down?’

*‘In winter-time a young man’s fancy
From his love will not be sundered,
But there’s no fun in bed with Nancy
When the temperature’s a hundred,’*

said Tom and he added, ‘The July nights were much too hot for fornication. We preferred to sleep under the stars.’

‘In other words,’ said Bonamy, ‘we *did* spend Sunday night in my godmother’s paddock and on the other two nights we were equally far from the madding crowd.’

‘That may turn out very awkward from your point of view, gentlemen. My advice is to stick to your assignments, however inconvenient, insanitary or uncomfortable they may be.’

‘So there it is, ma’am,’ said Mowbray later to Dame Beatrice. ‘One helpful pointer has emerged, though. There seems no reason to doubt those girls. Harrow, who is my barometer where the young of the female sex are concerned, is convinced that they were vexed and chagrined when the young fellows dodged the column.’

‘Was their excuse for so doing a genuine one? Did it ring true?’

‘Oh, indeed, ma’am. I myself slept in the porch those nights. I thought we were going to end up with violent thunderstorms, it was so hot and humid down here.’

‘It is never too hot for me. Old bones are sensitive only to the cold. I wonder if the quarrel the girls mentioned was between Saltergate and Veryan. The time Sarah quoted was eleven-thirty and that fits.’

‘And doesn’t help, ma’am.’

‘Well, now, have you Miss Broadmayne’s home address?’

‘With all the others, yes, ma’am. We had it in mind that all work at the castle would cease, at any rate for a time, after Professor Veryan’s death, and that the parties would disperse to their homes.’

‘Yes, one would have thought so. It might be interesting to take a look at Miss Broadmayne’s home and check whether one of the bedrooms, or any other part of the house, has been, re-decorated recently. Then I think you might find it equally interesting to ask Mr and Mrs Saltergate to reconsider the story they told me, or, at any rate, to add to it.’

‘They made the damaging admission, you tell me, ma’am, that they were both at the ruins on the Sunday night and that Mrs Saltergate was actually on the tower with the professor and was engaged in diverting his attention from Mr Saltergate, who was busy snooping around down below.’

‘I don’t think that is the whole story.’

‘I have checked at the Horse and Cart. They were seen to come in at the time they told you.’

‘And were not seen to got out again, but, of course, there is that fire escape.’

‘Are you suggesting—?’

‘No, no. I do not know for certain whether they were responsible for the death. I think they did see someone on the tower, but that was not necessarily Professor Veryan.’

‘I suppose it wouldn’t help if I could find out how Professor Veryan spent the daylight hours of Sunday, would it, ma’am?’

‘I cannot say, but it might be interesting, especially if he spent them with his divorced wife, although it would *prove* nothing, so far as I can see. Indeed, her alibi stands firm.’

‘I had not lost sight of the lady, ma’am. She stands to gain considerably by the death.’

‘Hardly considerably, I fancy, but it will be interesting to hear how much he had to leave. He is reputed to have been a man of wealth, but archaeological research is not cheap. From Mrs Veryan’s point of view, it might have been more advantageous that he should remain alive, receive a

university stipend, write (possibly) books, and continue paying her alimony.'

'You advised me to check on Miss Broadmayne. Any particular reason?'

'Only that she is an unusually muscular young woman, a match for most men, especially if they were not prepared for her onslaught. She was also, if reports can be believed, in a very frustrated state of mind and may have been blindly determined, like a child which smites or kicks its toys, to get her own back on somebody, no matter whether that person had offended her or not.'

'You don't seriously think she would commit murder?'

'Intentionally, no, but then probably the child who feels it has been punished unjustly does not really intend to break the doll or the toy. If you find that home decorations were carried out recently, that would do something to support Miss Broadmayne's alibi, but, if nothing of the sort was done, it does not prove anything except that she is prepared to bend the truth if it seems politic to do so.'

'That was a queer caper on the part of the other young lady. She doesn't strike me as the sort to go up to London and cut loose.'

'She has produced an alibi which she cannot prove and which you would find almost impossible to disprove. Of course, she is a highly intelligent girl.'

'If she weren't such a meagre little helping of skin and bone - asking your pardon for the description, ma'am - if she were like Miss Broadmayne or if she were a young gentleman, I mean, I might think of keeping her under suspicion, but, as it is, I haven't even checked at that farm where she was supposed to be staying. I had better, though, I suppose.'

'She may have told the London story out of bravado. I think you might do worse than check on her friends at that farm, as you say, and find out whether she did not go to them for the weekend after all.'

‘I would have done that earlier if I had thought she had either the guts or the strength to push Veryan off that tower, ma’am, but the idea seemed ludicrous.’

12

Disappearance of the Hired Help

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Mowbray had enough to keep him busy. Accompanied by Laura and Detective-Sergeant Harrow, who drove the car, he took Fiona to her home. The house was still empty, but there were letters on the doormat which she picked up, glanced at, and placed on a side table in the hall. She had not uttered a word during the journey.

‘Now, miss,’ said Mowbray, ‘it is not that I don’t believe you, but you will appreciate that I have my duty to do. People have given various accounts of how they spent the weekend and I need to check their statements very carefully in view of the serious nature of my investigations. Perhaps you will kindly take me to look at the painting and decorating you claim to have done in this house.’

‘Yes, well, all right,’ said Fiona. She led the way up the stairs. A door on the second-floor landing was wide open and was kept so by a wooden doorstep in the form of a black cat. A strong draught which blew into the faces of the investigators showed that the window was also wide open. There was a strong smell of paint.

Leaving the others on the landing, Mowbray entered the room. The window frames and ledges had been freshly painted, but the wallpaper had not been stripped, although there was a large can of emulsion on the floor. Mowbray looked about him.

‘How much time do you reckon you spent on the job, miss?’ he asked. Fiona shrugged shoulders which would not have disgraced the Village Blacksmith and came into the room.

‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I did a bit and then got myself a meal or sat in the garden and read, and then did another bit. I’m not awfully good at it, so it took me a long time to do what I have done. I’ll probably get a man in to finish it before my parents come back.’

‘I see, miss. Right. Thank you. After you, miss.’ As she made for the door he delicately touched the window ledge. The paint was still tacky. ‘Do you think it’s safe to leave a window wide open with nobody in the house?’ he asked.

‘I don’t want the window frame to stick,’ she said.

‘Your insurance company wouldn’t be very happy if you were burgled under these circumstances, miss.’

‘No, I suppose not. I never thought of that.’ She did not close the window, however, but descended the stairs. The others followed.

‘I can’t congratulate the young lady on her attempt to bolster up her alibi,’ said Mowbray, when he met Dame Beatrice. ‘That paint was never put on all that time ago. Of course, there’s nothing to prove she didn’t stay in her home for that weekend, but she certainly didn’t spend the time painting window frames and ledges. I regret it, but I shall have to keep her on my list.’

‘What about the other student, Miss Yateley?’

‘What indeed? She stays on the list, too, in spite of what I said about her. I’ve still got to see those farm people, but she claims to have joined in some sort of protest march in London. I’ve been in touch with the Metropolitan boys and there was no protest march anywhere in their area – and, as you know, ma’am, it’s a wide one – nothing at all that weekend. If she did go to London, she isn’t telling the truth of what she did there, at any rate not in that one particular. I think you will agree, ma’am, if there is one tile out of

place, the whole roof probably needs inspection because it can no longer be considered weatherproof, and, in my book, that goes for this alibi of hers.'

'The young hardly seem to come out of this with untarnished truthfulness, do they?'

'Well, we're certainly back to square one with Mr Monkswood and Mr Hassocks, ma'am. Besides, the Saltergates and Mr Tynant and even Dr Lochlure are also anything but in the clear. What to do about them I don't know, although I'm inclined to dismiss Dr Lochlure from my considerations. I've combed through the staff at the Holdy Bay hotel and there's no doubt she and Tynant booked out on the Sunday evening separately, the way they had booked in, although they shared a table in the dining-room, and there's no doubt Dr Lochlure came back shortly afterwards with the story that her car – she does not appear to have mentioned Tynant, neither did anybody see him again that night – that her car had broken down and she would be glad of a bed for the night.'

'And, so far as is known, she occupied it.'

'Yes, and got them to ring up a taxi for her in the morning. Tynant may have brought her back to the Holdy Bay hotel, but he did not go in that Sunday night.'

'What about the Saltergates?'

'Same old story. They came back to the Horse and Cart when they said they did, went up to their room and appeared at the usual time for breakfast before preparing to go off to the castle for their morning's work on the ruins, only to be stopped by a phone call from Tynant informing them of Veryan's death. What they did or where they went between about midnight and breakfast time, with that fire-escape so safe and handy, is anybody's guess. My trouble is that they don't fit the picture.'

'In what way?'

'I can imagine Saltergate getting sore enough with Veryan to throw him off the tower and hurl his telescope

after him, but I can't imagine him wiping his own fingerprints off the telescope. I don't believe it would have occurred to him to take those sort of precautions.'

'So we are dogs chasing our own tails. There is just one source of information we might tap, although I doubt whether we shall get much help from it. I wonder what the arrangements were in respect of giving permission to three separate parties to go to work on the castle ruins?'

'*Three* separate parties, ma'am?'

'Certainly, and each had to get permission from the landowner. The Saltergates wanted to tidy up and, to some extent, to restore the defences of the castle; Professor Veryan, assisted by Mr Tynant, wanted permission to excavate, as I understand it, a late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age burial mound; and my godson and his friend had heard rumours of treasure hidden in one of the castle wells. Each party must have asked permission and none seems to have been refused it.'

'You regard that as significant, ma'am?'

'Yes, indeed I do. The interests of the various parties were bound to clash and it is my opinion that, if the owner is away from home, permission may well have been granted only by the caretaker and to give three separate permits seems extremely strange unless there was some very good reason for it, don't you think? It seems to me that if the owner is absent he may not even have been consulted. I am told that the caretaker has visited the ruins, yet, from what I have gathered, one would hardly suspect him of taking an interest in mediaeval fortifications or prehistoric burials. What kind of man is the owner? Is anything known about him?'

'Bought the estate only a couple of years ago. Not a native, as they call it in these parts. Made money and is a bit jumped up. Not exactly out of the top drawer, so to speak. He wouldn't care tuppence whether the castle is a historical monument or a broken-down cowshed, so far as I

can make out from the local people. A good enough chap in his way, by all accounts, charitable and a good landlord and all that, but your view that the caretaker gave permission for the tidying-up and the dig is very interesting.'

'Would you describe the owner as a wealthy man?'

'Made his money on the stock market, so I'm told, ma'am.'

'Go and see whether he has returned. If not, contact the agent or whoever is in charge. Ask which of the three parties was first in getting permission to carry out a survey of the castle ruins. Somebody must have had priority and that may be the answer to our problem of why Veryan was killed and who killed him.'

The next development was unexpected but occasioned no particular surprise. It was reported by Bonamy to Dame Beatrice.

'I say, you know,' he said, 'those chaps who are supposed to do most of Tynant's digging, well, they don't turn up any more and Tom and I are getting a bit cheesed off at lugging our guts out. It's not as though we are ever going to get anywhere with the wells. If the treasure is in one of them, there it's likely to stay and, that being so, our real reason for being here and using up the vac has gone.'

Dame Beatrice responded sympathetically, but offered no advice as to his and Tom's future procedure. She was far more interested in Mowbray's attempts to confirm or discredit the rest of the alibis. His next move had been to check with Tynant exactly what had happened concerning the breakdown of the car on the night of Veryan's death, but made no headway against a practised debater, particularly as the outdoor staff at the Barbican were fully prepared to confirm Tynant's story that they had found him waiting patiently to be admitted to the hotel before breakfast time on the Monday morning.

Susannah proved equally obdurate. The car *had* broken down, Tynant *had* escorted her to the hotel, they *had*

provided her with a bed and she *had* asked them to ring up a taxi after she had had an early breakfast on the following morning. The all-night garage consulted their records at Mowbray's request and confirmed that they had had the car, adjusted what had proved to be a very slight fault and had returned the car at midday to the Barbican hotel, where Tynant, 'in a tizzy because he had found the other gentleman dead', had paid for the repairs and got a receipt for the money. Tynant produced the receipt.

Mrs Veryan stuck to the story she had already told Mowbray.

'I told you,' she said somewhat peevishly, 'I was on a friend's cruiser for the whole weekend. We were off the Suffolk coast and did not land until Tuesday morning, when I read of the death. Of course I can prove it. You said yourself that my friends had backed up my story. Besides, why on earth would I want to kill Malpas? He was generous and understanding and much more use to me alive than dead. It has now been confirmed that the income his money will bring me in is a good deal less than the alimony which he most faithfully paid and, as my lawyers have told you, I can't touch the capital. That remains in trust until I die and then it will go to archaeological research. I've *told* you all this. Why do you go on badgering me?' Mowbray left it at that.

'So I still don't understand, sir,' he said to Tynant, 'why, having taken Dr Lochlure back to the hotel, you did not commandeer a bed for yourself as well as one for the lady, after you had telephoned the garage.'

'Do I have to keep spelling it out?' demanded Tynant irritably. 'Susannah and I were resolved not to return to Holdy village together. I am deeply concerned for her reputation. We were not supposed to have spent the weekend together. She was supposed to have stayed at the home of Fiona Broadmayne and nobody cared a damn what I did on my own, but there soon would have been wagging

tongues if it was known – as it is now, unfortunately – that we spent the weekend together at Holdy Bay. I may add that I have made a formal proposal of marriage to Susannah.’

‘So all’s well that ends well, sir.’

‘No. If you must know, she turned me down. If you really want something useful to do, you might find me another couple of stalwarts to help on my dig. You remember them, Stickle and Stour? Well, I’ve enquired at the hostel in Pureford where they were living, but they seem to have walked out from there without giving notice and it’s three days now since anybody has seen them.’

‘Pureford seems a long way off from here, sir. It’s all of fifteen miles, isn’t it?’

‘They came in on a motorbike and sidecar every morning and rode back to the hostel at midday. We don’t work in the afternoons because of the weather and the women. We paid the men a generous petrol allowance. They were not permanent residents, I believe, but itinerants who usually picked up jobs on building sites or any other casual labour they could get. They were glad enough of this job here, I thought, because it offered steady work for a couple of months or even longer. I can’t see any reason why they should have walked out on me.’

‘Had they asked for better wages and been refused, sir? Had there been discontent?’

‘Not so far as I know, but, of course, Veryan engaged them in the first place, not myself. They may have got involved with something at the hostel, but on the site here I never heard of any trouble. I suppose they just got tired of the job or maybe they got to know of something where the pay was better or the work easier. I’m very anxious to replace them. My volunteers are getting fed-up at having to carry on without any extra help.’

With the assistance of Detective-Sergeant Harrow, that lissome lady-killer, Mowbray had re-checked all the rest of

the evidence, if such it could be called, that he had collected concerning the availability of the fire-escape at the Horse and Cart for nefarious or legitimate entry into and departure from that hostelry. He had discovered that, on those luminous summer nights, any figure standing or sitting at the top of the castle keep was silhouetted against the sky and plainly visible from the flat part of the hotel roof. Except in respect of height, however – for instance, Priscilla could not have been mistaken for Veryan or Susannah for Saltergate – there was a less than even chance of a name being put to any person seen by night on the tower. He had tried the same experiment from the Barbican, but the church tower obstructed the view from the highest windows in the hotel and there was no flat part of the roof on which any observer or watcher could stand.

‘It comes back every time either to Tynant or the Saltergates,’ said Mowbray, ‘and that, I reckon, means him, not her. I like him and she is a very nice lady, but they did have a row with Veryan and these academics can be real nasty to each other when they roll their sleeves up and start in.’

‘They’re only nasty to one another in print, sir. They don’t *do* anything,’ said Harrow.

‘Saltergate is a nutter where that restoration of the castle is concerned.’

‘He wouldn’t have thought about wiping his dabs off the telescope, sir, and that’s all we’ve got to go on in thinking this is a case of murder. I reckon Tynant’s our man.’

‘So what *did* you get up to that weekend, miss?’ asked Harrow.

‘What I told that other policeman,’ said Fiona. ‘I took him along to my home and he saw the paint on the window frames.’

‘He also touched it, miss. In this weather, and with the window and door wide open, it ought to have dried, but it hadn’t. Come on, now, miss. Do yourself a bit of good. We

know we've got a case of murder on our hands and it's obvious that a fit, lovely-made young lady like yourself could have made mincemeat of a string-bean like Professor Veryan, had you felt the urge.'

'Well, I didn't feel the urge. I had nothing against Professor Veryan. I have nothing against anybody in our castle party which would make me want to injure them physically.'

'I believe you absolutely, miss, so why not come clean? You must have been up to something you didn't want known, but, whatever it was, it can't have been as serious as finding yourself on a murder charge.'

'I think your argument is shaky.'

'Not as shaky as your alibi, miss. Do yourself a bit of good, like I say. We're interested in nothing except the death of Professor Veryan. If you went out and burgled a house or robbed a bank, that doesn't concern us in the least, but in faking an alibi you give rise to our worst suspicions, don't you see?'

Fiona looked at his handsome, concerned and friendly young face and, although she wondered for one passing half-second what the serpent in Eden must have looked like when he overcame Eve so easily, she decided to trust her present tempter.

'Well, I did spend most of the weekend at my parents' house, as I said, but on Sunday night I came back to do some poaching.'

'Poaching? Where, miss?' Harrow was sceptical.

'On the Holdy manor estate.'

'Did you get anything?'

'No. I walked slap into a keeper. He had a gun, so I didn't argue with him. He marched me off and locked me in a little hut. After about two hours he came back and unlocked the door and made an unacceptable suggestion to me, so, gun or no gun, I bashed his face in and ran to where I had left the car.'

‘I shall have to check your story, miss.’

‘Check away,’ said Fiona calmly. ‘That dirty-minded little lecher will remember me all right and, anyway, I went poaching because I was bored and fed up, but I didn’t get a pheasant or a salmon or a rabbit and nobody can say I did.’

‘Well,’ said Mowbray, when Harrow reported the interview, ‘it’s the sort of story which, given that type of modern young woman, could very well be true. I’ll check it, because it will give me an excuse to do as Dame Beatrice has suggested, and ask some questions which may prove to be important if the answers are what I’m hoping they will be. If that gamekeeper is the chap I think he is, I’ll twist his tail until he comes clean. There was a nasty case of alleged rape against him a couple of years back – nothing could be proved and he produced what appeared to be a foolproof alibi, but I knew the girl and I reckon she was telling the truth.’ Meanwhile, you had better have another go at that hostel in Pureford and find out whether they have any news of Stickle and Stour. They couldn’t help us when we first questioned them, but this scarpering without a word to anybody is beginning to look very suspicious.’

‘Yes, sir, I agree. These chaps with no obvious roots are often on the fringe of the criminal world and if they had seen any advantage in getting rid of Veryan—’

‘Yes, but that advantage hasn’t shown up yet, has it? Tynant tells me that when Veryan engaged them and two others – that was before he knew that young Monkswood and young Hassocks were prepared to work on the site – he took it for granted that they were all men from Holdy village. Two of them were; they were the ones Veryan put off. I begin to wonder whether perhaps he sacked the wrong couple.’

‘I can’t see what possible motive two itinerant labourers could have had for murdering him, sir. Surely Tynant would know if there had been a dispute of any sort.’

‘I wonder if they had found out about Veryan’s stargazing. In that case they might have climbed the tower to get him on his own and take him by surprise with a demand for better wages, and when he refused them—’

‘It doesn’t seem likely, does it, sir, on the face of it? What did you make of them when you had a word with them before the inquest?’

‘There was nothing special about them at all. It wouldn’t surprise me to hear they’d done porridge, but neither would it surprise me to hear that they had always kept just the right side of the law.’

‘Were they Irishmen, would you say, sir?’

‘No, Geordies come south to pick up what jobs they could.’

‘Well, we shall have to track down those two fellows. Find out the last time anybody saw them at work.’

‘I thought Mr Tynant said they had been missing for three days, sir.’

‘Check with the rest of the party. I’m not too keen to take Tynant’s word for anything at present. Find out whether there has been any kind of dispute. In these hard times men don’t pass up on a regular job just for the hell of it.’

Harrow’s report bore out Tynant’s assertion. It was three days since anything had been seen of the two workmen.

‘I don’t like it,’ said Mowbray. ‘Veryan is dead and, if these chaps have any knowledge, guilty or otherwise, of how he came to his death, either they’ve scarpered or somebody has laid for them and anything may have happened to them.’

There was a further bit of information to come Mowbray’s way and again he checked it for accuracy, this time taking the onus on himself. Tynant came to him and asked abruptly why ‘that detective-sergeant of yours has

been pussyfooting around and harassing the girls and young Tom Hassocks'. Mowbray dealt with him sternly.

'So many lies and half-lies have been told me and there has been so much wriggling and squirming since Professor Veryan's death, sir, that I am very anxious to find out whether any of your party can lead me to the truth, or at any rate can give me a clue to the disappearance of these men, Stickle and Stour.'

'Oh, I appreciate that, but nobody here can possibly account for their knocking off work. There is one other thing, though, and you can check this with the others if my word is not good enough for you. I had my suspicions the first day those fellows did not turn up. Yesterday, while your sergeant was busying himself with the young people, I made a more detailed inspection which fully confirmed what I have been thinking for some time.'

'Oh, yes, sir?'

Tynant became impressive. He swept back the dark elf-lock from a noble forehead, raised an arm towards his trench and said,

'On several nights since Professor Veryan's death somebody has been here, dug deeper into my trench and then tried to make the soil look as though nothing had been disturbed.'

'No damage, then, I take it, sir.'

'Could easily come to damage if it goes on. If amateurs begin messing about on the site, they may do irreparable harm and bring my whole project to a point where it is useless for me to continue here.'

'Looks to me,' said Detective-Sergeant Harrow, when Tynant had gone, 'as if those two chaps have given up daytime work in favour of doing a night-shift.'

'But why on earth should they do that?'

'All the neighbourhood thinks Tynant is digging for buried treasure, not prehistoric graves, sir.'

‘Oh, that poppycock! I thought Veryan had had a reporter from the *Holdy Bay Messenger* and had explained to him what the dig was all about.’

‘A newspaper article wouldn’t alter local opinion, sir.’

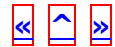
‘That’s obvious, I suppose, if some jokers have been sneaking along by night and having a go at Tynant’s trench for themselves.’

‘Stickle and Stour, don’t you think, sir?’

‘Oh, well, if so, it’s up to Tynant to catch them at it, although I don’t see what he could charge them with. They don’t seem to have done any damage, and it isn’t his property, anyway.’

13

Vandalism



Mowbray, having thought matters over, went back to the castle again, walked under the arch of the cleared gatehouse and up the slope to where Tynant was pegging out his second circle assisted by Susannah, and asked, 'Could I interrupt you for a moment, sir?' Susannah moved away.

'Of course. No trace of my workmen, I suppose?' said Nicholas.

'It is concerning them that I've come. I've been wondering whether you or any of your companions have missed anything?'

'Had something stolen? Not that I know of. You think those men made off with some of our property?'

'It occurred to me, sir. Now, about their means of transport. They lodged a good way from here.'

'I thought you knew that they came on a biggish old motorbike, with a sidecar. I don't know which of them it belonged to or whether it was jointly owned. Why?'

'What about tools for the digging? Did you supply those, or did they bring their own?'

'I supplied a pick and two shovels. The ground is rock-hard and has to be broken up before we can excavate.' A pickaxe was lying on the ground near where the sweating Bonamy and Tom were shifting soil out of the almost completed outer trench. Tynant motioned towards it and went on, 'Young Hassocks has been using it. I wasn't too keen on letting him try, but he said he had used one before.'

You can give yourself a very nasty wound on the foot if you're not careful. The curve on the blade, or whatever it's called, is deceptive.'

'Yes, I tried taming a wild part of my garden with a reaping-hook last year and gave myself the deuce of a chop on the shin before I got the hang of the thing,' said Mowbray.

'A scythe is worse still. Anyway, so far, Tom has done himself no mischief with the pick, and we really can't manage without it.'

'I suppose you have contacted the hostel again where Stickle and Stour were staying, sir?'

'Oh, yes. They haven't been back there. The warden promised to let me know if they turned up again. If they don't come back, I must still try to get somebody else.'

'Why did Professor Vryan settle for the hostel chaps, and not men from the village, sir?'

'Goodness knows. I don't suppose he had any particular reason. Just had to make a choice, I suppose. Perhaps he preferred men who came from a distance. I believe there has been some resentment in the village because of the ruins being closed to the public. The hotel bars and the little restaurant have probably suffered from a lack of tourists, and the shopkeepers and the petrol pumps as well. A place like Holdy lives on the summer visitors and they only come to climb about on the ruins, so - no castle, no visitors.'

'I see that the ladies' caravan is no longer here, sir. We had it put back after the inquest, as you know.'

'Now that the two lads have moved out of the keep, the girls were not very keen on staying here at night.'

'Not even though there were three of them?'

'There weren't, you see. I persuaded Dr Lochlure that it would be better if she moved into one of the hotels and the students moved into the cottage which I'm renting for the boys. When Susannah found out how nervous Priscilla was

feeling at being so near the spot where Malpas was killed, and Fiona's being all upset after an encounter she had with a licentious gamekeeper—'

'Oh, Miss Broadmayne told you about that, did she?'

'No, she told Susannah and Susannah told me. I then suggested the cottage for the girls and, at that, Susannah agreed to move into the hotel.'

'The Barbican?'

'Yes. They agreed to put somebody else into Veryan's room, as she would hardly like to sleep in there, and they have given her a bed on another floor. I must say that I am glad of her company at table. She makes a very agreeable addition, as the two boys, I'm sure, would agree.'

'Where did Stickle and Stour leave their motorbike and sidecar while they were at work, sir?'

'In the inn yard at the Barbican. Veryan made them sign on each morning, so that was the most convenient place.'

'Could I see the signing-on book, sir?'

'The men met him in the inn yard each morning, so I expect it's somewhere in Veryan's car. I myself haven't bothered with it. I should have thought your chaps found it when they looked at the car and at his room.'

'Would it be a small black notebook with shiny covers?'

'I don't believe I ever saw it.'

'We tested it for fingerprints and put it back in the glove compartment, where we found it.'

'So you've got those fellows' prints.'

'No, sir - at least, not from the notebook. It contained dates and crosses, and the only prints we have from the notebook are those of Professor Veryan himself, which we verified from the body.'

'Why did you need to check?'

'Just routine procedure, sir, in following up a doubtful matter.' Mowbray thought that Tynant was about to ask another question, but it did not come, so he went over to the two young men. They had knocked off work and were

leaning on their shovels. Mowbray gestured towards the pick.

‘Warm work,’ he said, ‘in this weather.’

‘Don’t mock,’ said Tom.

‘And how do you like your new quarters, sir?’

‘We no longer have them to ourselves, but we’re not there much. We still eat at the Barbican and we let the girls have first go at the bathroom in the cottage, so they’re up and away before we turn out. It seems to work out all right and, as we are not doing the paying, we can’t grumble.’

‘Would you know how the two young ladies spend their evenings?’

‘Not a clue. They are always in by the time we get back from the pub. We hear their voices, so we know they’re there, but we don’t fraternise. They are no more enthralled with the arrangements than we are. Veryan’s death has upset everybody.’

Mowbray nodded and strolled over to where Edward Saltergate, seated on a chunk of what had been part of the castle wall, was sketching with a stick of charcoal on the top sheet of a thickish block of cartridge paper. He looked up as Mowbray loomed over him.

‘Ah, Detective-Superintendent!’ he said in amiable greeting. ‘Are you on duty or are you merely taking the air?’

‘Both, sir. How is the work going?’

‘Oh, nicely, very nicely. Come and see what we have done in the keep and the hall.’

‘Some other time, if you don’t mind, sir. I’m glad everything is going well. You remember two workmen who were helping with Mr Tynant’s trench?’

‘I have good reason to remember them. I had to warn them to keep clear of my flanking-towers. They were beginning to threaten my walls with their abominable trench.’

‘When did you issue this warning, sir?’

‘Oh, a few days ago. I took the matter up with Tynant, too. He had promised me that his trench would be continued in a clockwise direction, to take it away from my walls, but he must have broken his promise or misdirected them and they reverted to anti-clockwise, as they had been doing under Veryan’s instructions.’

‘Some men find it easier to trench from right to left, I suppose, sir, and others from left to right. Anyway, they seem to have taken your words to heart, in a way. They’ve passed up on the job altogether.’

‘I know. Tynant was not very pleased when I told him. He thinks it’s my fault that they have decided to leave.’

‘Were you very severe on them?’

‘Not at all. I reminded them of the arrangement I had made with Tynant and insisted that they respect it. They apologised and agreed to work away from my foundations. I thought that was the end of it, because they turned up on the next two mornings; so obviously they had not taken offence.’

‘Will you spare Miss Broadmayne from her labours for a few minutes, sir?’ Without waiting for an answer, he walked up the steepest part of the castle mound, passed by the wall of the inner bailey, or what remained of it, and accosted Fiona, who was contemplating a semicircular bulge which had been part of the main defences to the entrance to the keep. ‘Could I have a word, miss?’ he said.

‘Anything to knock off work for a bit. What is it?’

‘When you’ve had your lunch, miss, I’m going to drive you over to the gamekeeper’s cottage.’

‘Good Lord, I don’t want to meet *that* oaf again!’

‘You will be safe with me and my driver, miss. Perhaps you would care to have another of the ladies to accompany you.’

So, at just after two o’clock, Mowbray and a detective-constable in the front seats, Fiona and Lilian at the back, the party of four drove to the manor house, passed in

through open gates beside the untenanted lodge and made for the woods.

The gamekeeper's cottage was on the edge of them and the gamekeeper himself was stretched out in a long wicker chair with the dancing flecks of sunshine and the shifting shadows of leaves making patterns on his shirt and the cushions.

'Rouse up, Goole,' said the Detective-Superintendent. The man swung his legs over the side of the chair and stared at the visitors. 'You know this young lady, I think,' Mowbray went on.

'She was all amongst my pheasants I be rearing against the autumn shoot. I thought as how she were a poacher.'

'When was this?'

'Couple o' weeks back, I daresay. Yes, and on a Sunday night, too! No time for a young female to be walkin' alone in the woods.'

'You had no business to lock her up,' said Lilian Saltergate severely.

'I on'y meant to scare her a bit. I soon let her go, and if she says I laid a finger on her, she's lying.'

'You threatened me with a gun,' said Fiona.

'What time was this?' asked Mowbray. The detective-constable fished out a notebook. The gamekeeper eyed it apprehensively.

'That old owl had just screeched for the second time that night. Good as a clock he is. That would have been about midnight, near enough,' he said.

'And you thought the young lady was setting snares?'

' "Them rabbits ain't game," ' she says, "so you can't poach 'em," she says. "But my pheasants is game," I says, "and you be all among 'em, disturving of their night's rest," I says, "so you come along o'me," I says.'

'And you threatened me with your gun and locked me in that beastly smelly shed for two hours. I've got a luminous

watch, so I timed you,' said Fiona, 'and when you let me out you made a filthy suggestion to me.'

'That were only a joke, sir,' said Goole, appealing to Mowbray.

'Do you agree with the young lady's estimate that she was locked up for two hours?'

'I only wanted to teach her a lesson and the smell was only my ferrets.'

'They nearly scared me to death,' said Fiona. 'I heard them moving about. I thought the beastly shed was haunted.'

'It might not be a bad idea,' said Mowbray to his driver as they were returning Fiona and Lilian to Holdy village, 'to have a look round that fellow's place. I don't like the cut of his jib. I'll tell Harrow to take you and a couple of the uniformed branch along. If the agent challenges you, tell him in a polite way to go to hell. I don't think you'll have any trouble with Goole. He will let you into his cottage without a warrant and you won't find anything there, but have another look at that shed where the young lady was locked up. I've no idea what you may find there but, if it's been inspected once, he won't think we'll go to it again, so if he *has* got anything to hide—'

'Such as a motorbike and sidecar, sir?'

'No. I was only thinking of a pick and a couple of shovels.'

'Dear Godmother,' (wrote Bonamy), 'I don't want to telephone you because I think the police are now tapping all calls that go out from the village and I'm not sure whether we're supposed to be *incommunicado* so far as the outside world is concerned, so I'm sending you this letter. Fun and games are still going on here. It's all very uncomfortable for us, but nobody can say it's dull.'

There followed an account of Fiona's adventures, for she had broken the barrier at the cottage and, waylaying Bonamy as he and Tom left the Barbican after dinner, she

said, 'Could you bear to have a confab with us when you get back this evening? Things are hotting up and we could do with some support from our contemporaries.'

'Sure,' said Bonamy. 'We would invite you to join us at the pub in Stint Magna, but it would make an awkwardness. We've—'

'Got a couple of birds there,' said Tom, 'and we wouldn't want to give them a false impression, if you see what I mean.'

'See you later, then,' said Fiona.

'Have you two got wind-up about something?' asked Bonamy.

'Not exactly, but we're not very easy in our minds.'

'Oh, well, we'll be back soon after eleven. Our pub's got an off-licence. We'll bring back something to drink and make it a party.'

The party broke up at midnight because, after her third gin, Priscilla began to cry, but, before that, the young men had received a graphic account from Fiona of the night excursion to the woods, the encounter with the gamekeeper, her incarceration in the shed with the ferrets, and, finally, of her second visit, this time in the company of Lilian and Mowbray.

'So,' Bonamy's letter went on, 'although I suppose this gamekeeper Goole could have gone to the keep and shoved Veryan off the top of it while Fiona was locked in the shed, there is no proof that he knew anything about the work being done at the castle, or that Veryan was an amateur astronomer – are there professional ones? – or, in fact, that he and Veryan had ever set eyes on one another. It's true that Veryan had been up to the house to argue his case against Saltergate, but that had nothing to do with the gamekeeper who, hereafter, will be ignored, I'm sure, by the police. Well, I had better get to the point...'

'I guess he better had,' commented Laura, when, having been handed the letter, she had read the first scribbled

pages.

‘The point is this,’ Bonamy had continued. ‘Last night, while we were hobnobbing in the cottage with the two girls, somebody or bodies must have been playing merry hell with Tynant’s trenches. Of course, with our removal from the keep and the caravan gone from the verge below the gatehouse, the place is a free-for-all once we’ve stopped work at lunchtime, for nobody goes back in the afternoons because of the hard work and the heat. Tom and I pick up Virginia and Sarah; Fiona and Priscilla go off in Tom’s car and find a quiet beach for sunbathing and a swim; Tynant, I have no doubt, is still pursuing Susannah; and I rather imagine that the Saltergates spend a lazy afternoon on the flat roof of the Horse and Cart because an awning has been erected, so they would be in the shade.

‘Well, when we arrived with Tynant and Susannah after breakfast – we’ve given up our early morning search for the treasure; three wells have been located and cleared, but only to a depth of about a couple of feet, which is no good to Tom and me, for, without proper equipment, we can see no way of excavating them further – where was I? Oh, yes! The devastation was immediately obvious. The village jobs had been playing a game of Up, Guards, and at ‘em, I should think, and the fun has ended in sheer bloodyminded destruction.’

‘Typical of the modern young,’ said Laura, reading the last few words aloud.

‘Typical of *some* of them,’ amended Dame Beatrice. ‘As Mowbray telephoned to tell us two workmen are missing, I think I would like to go along and visit the scene of this devastation. I wonder whether it ties up with something the boys told us about a trench being unlawfully deepened?’

‘I’m all for it, but what is the object of the exercise?’

‘I think there must be a rumour current in the village that somewhere in the castle grounds treasure has been buried.’

‘So you don’t think there has been just plain blind vandalism?’

‘It is only a suggestion that there may have been method in the seeming madness. I have an open mind.’

‘Slightly biased by what you know of human nature and its go-get instinct, though. Oh, I still haven’t finished reading Bonamy’s letter.’

‘The damage to the site is pretty considerable,’ Bonamy had continued. ‘Everybody is certain that it is the work of village hooligans, although I’m bound to say that, although we’ve now been on the spot for some time, we have never seen a sign of skinheads or other rumbustious gangs. However, something young Priscilla said, just as the gin, plus a poem she insisted on reciting to us, caused her to wash out the party atmosphere with some very embarrassing sobs and tears, has made me think a bit. She said that she is certain Tynant and Saltergate have had a worse row than the one Saltergate had with Vryan, and we know how that one ended up, although it would be libellous for me to make any obvious connection.’

‘He’s made one all right, though,’ commented Laura, ‘but we gave up suspecting Saltergate ages ago, and I thought Bonamy had too. Still, there’s the hint, for what it’s worth. As for the row, I’ve no doubt that Priscilla, the wan little half-portion, is right. There’s so little of her, and what there is is so quiet and unnoticeable, that perhaps she gets to hear things which would not be said in front of other people.’

‘I think you may be right about Priscilla, but I certainly refuse to believe that Mr Saltergate, however bitter his feelings, would stoop to the kind of revenge at which Bonamy hints. We may be able to come to firmer conclusions when we have seen for ourselves how much and what kind of damage has been done. Ring up Holdy Bay and find out whether our hotel can lodge us tonight

and tomorrow night. I want to get to Castle Holdy before too much clearing up is done.'

'Right. I love not to let the grass grow.' Laura skipped to the end of the letter, folded it and handed it back. She returned from the telephone to report that rooms were available at the Seagull. 'I suppose business has fallen off since they axed the local railway,' she said. 'Are we proposing to look at the castle before we clock in at the hotel?'

'Certainly. We can lunch on the way down.'

'Do you think I underestimate young Yateley?'

'She may not have a head for gin and she may be affected deeply by poetry, especially when she is reciting it, but there is nothing wrong with her brains. So far as I know, she has made only one slip. According to the Chief Constable, she stated to Detective-Superintendent Mowbray that, during the fateful weekend when Professor Veryan died, she joined in some kind of political demonstration. Investigation proved that there were no London marches, political or otherwise, at that time. I wonder why she made a statement which could be disproved by the county police in contact with the Metropolitan branch? I suppose W. S. Gilbert has the answer.'

'To lend verisimilitude, et cetera?'

'Exactly.'

Bonamy's reference to the damage was, as Laura put it, the understatement of the century. Tynant's outer trench was a gaping, soil-scattered ruin. The pegs he had put in to mark the inner trench had been dragged out and thrown away and a pick and shovel had eliminated all traces of his carefully measured inner circle.

'Looks as though the Gadarene swine have been out on a bender,' said Laura. There was more to come, but of a very different nature. Mowbray's posse, sent to search Goole's shed and the woods, had found a motorcycle combination

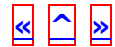
in a little clearing. Goole, although hard-pressed by Mowbray, strenuously denied all knowledge of how it had come to be there.

‘And I believe him up to a point, sir,’ said Harrow. ‘I don’t think he would have left it in the open. He’d have hidden it in that shed of his.’

‘But then he couldn’t have denied knowledge of it,’ said Mowbray.

14

Interim Reports



The moon is up, the stars are bright, the wind is fresh and free”,’ said Tom.

‘Meaning what?’

‘Meaning, as Alfred Noyes went on to say, “we’re out to seek for gold tonight”, although not across the silver sea, but in the devastated area which used to be the outer bailey of Holdy Castle. Now that there is no star-gazer on top of the keep and no caravan at the gatehouse, the coast is most beautifully clear and we ought to take advantage of the fact.’

‘I thought you had given up all thought of the treasure. It seems impossible for us to clear the wells.’

‘I’m beginning to wonder whether other people besides ourselves have got wind that there may be something worthwhile among those ruins. I’ve been thinking about the mess somebody has made of Tynant’s trenches and trying to work out who was responsible for it.’

‘Village louts.’

‘There don’t seem to be any. Most of the residents are retired people with sufficient means to buy up the old cottages, convert them and pass a blameless old age adding various amenities to their dwellings, messing about with gardening and, when they want a bit of excitement, walking the dog and cleaning the car or having cream teas at the restaurant.’

‘Then who did vandalise Tynant’s trenches?’

‘Either Stickle and Stour or the two chaps who lost the chance of a job on the site when you and I volunteered to help out. You mark my words. A rumour has gone around. Chaps like Stickle and Stour would never believe that Tynant is doing all that digging just to find an old grave with a few mouldy bones and some bits of broken pottery or whatever. I bet there are plenty of folk-tales about buried treasure at the castle. There must be, or somebody wouldn’t have written that piece in the county magazine. What’s more, they think the stuff is buried in the outer bailey, otherwise Tynant, in their opinion, would be excavating wells, not methodically digging trenches. The point is, you know, they could be right.’

‘Then why hasn’t somebody had a go before this?’

‘Be yourself, man! The castle is on private property. Nobody would have dared to organise a dig for gold without permission, but now our lot have come along and begun the work, so the whole situation, so far as the natives are concerned, has changed.’

‘They’ve still no right to come and ruin Tynant’s work.’

‘Never mind about their rights. Of course they haven’t got any, but the fact that digging is being done, and quite deep digging at that, means that all the old stories will have come back to people’s minds. When I was getting the drinks at lunchtime today, the barman asked me whether we’d had any luck yet. “Luck about what?” I said. At that, he winked and laid a finger resembling a large pork sausage against his bulbous proboscis and then shook his head at me. Something has gone around and, if the next village has got wind of a treasure hunt, goodness knows what is seething underground in Holdy itself. I think we ought to take advantage of the moonlight to have a good look at the whole site while nobody else is about.’

‘I’m not too enthusiastic about being seen loitering about on the site at present. I think Tynant may suspect Saltergate is at the bottom of this destruction business. He

doesn't accept that it was done by louts or by Stickle and Stour. You remember that young Priscilla told us that Tynant and Saltergate had a bust-up last week. She heard Saltergate talking to Mrs Saltergate about it. I wonder whether my godmother has got the letter I posted this afternoon and what she will make of what I told her?'

'Don't change the subject. Are we going gold-digging or aren't we?'

'I thought I had made my position clear,' said Bonamy. 'However, reluctant as I am to underline such remarks as I may deign to toss at you as fancy dictates and my blood-pressure allows, I will make myself clearer. I don't go anywhere near those ruddy ruins at night, treasure or no treasure. I don't intend to be mistaken for one of the blighters who messed up those trenches. Tynant is nearly crazy with fury about them.'

'Who's to see us?'

'Probably half the village would see us. There must have been a couple of dozen gawpers there when we got to the site this morning, so the word will have gone round to everybody by now and, for all I know, there may be a couple of hundred at the site at this very moment, rooting around like pigs after truffles. Tynant will have to pay nightwatchmen with guns and dogs if he wants to keep people off treasure-hunting now. It will be worse than the Klondyke gold-rush.'

'Tynant is as sick as mud, I agree, but, whatever Priscilla says, I don't believe Tynant really thinks Saltergate is responsible for the damage. Nobody who has even the slightest knowledge of him would think for an instant that he would be capable of ruining another man's work. If the boot was on the other foot I wouldn't be so sure. Tynant is not my favourite man and I think him quite capable of playing nasty tricks.'

'You're biased because of his interest in Susannah.'

‘Maybe. Anyway, Fiona thinks that he has put his luck to the test and that Susannah has turned him down. That was a strange business about her and the gamekeeper and the motorbike thing. I wonder what the idea was?’

‘The idea of leaving the bike in those woods? It makes no sense at all, unless Stickle and Stour were Veryan’s killers and ditched the bike so that they couldn’t be traced through its being recognised.’

‘I might accept that if they had cleared out directly they knew that the police were not going to accept that Veryan’s death was accidental, but they stayed on through all the police questioning. It’s only over the last few days that we haven’t seen anything of them.’

Mowbray had leant heavily on Goole when the police found the vehicle in the woods.

‘How did it come there?’

‘How should I know? It ain’t a part of the woods which concerns me and my work. Them trees and bushes isn’t nobody’s concern but the woodman’s, and he don’t have no call to go there till he’s told, and he won’t be told, not till the master gets back.’

‘The men who own that bike and sidecar have gone missing. What do you know about that?’

‘What men? I don’t know nobody what own a bike and side-car. Nobody don’t use them things nowadays. If I’d of found it, I daresay I’d have thought it belonged to the young lady.’

‘And if it had been hers, what were you going to do when she or a friend of hers came to claim it?’

‘I dunno. Just ‘and it over, like, I reckon, so long as she could make good as it were hern.’

‘No doubt you would have expected to get something for your trouble.’

‘I don’t never think of no such thing. I’m honest, I am.’

‘All right, Goole, but you watch your step, that’s all. You’d be in dead trouble if the young lady had pressed

charges of wrongful arrest, unlawful incarceration and improper intention to assault her.'

'Garn!' said Goole. 'I on'y wanted to fritten her a bit.'

'You threatened her with a lethal weapon.'

'It's my right if I cotches a poacher.'

'Next time you catch a young lady in your woods, I'll have you for behaviour liable to cause a breach of the peace if you dare to threaten her.'

'She blacked my eye. It was her as breached the peace.'

'All right, we'll leave it at that. I suppose you can't give me any idea what time of the day or night the motorbike (which you now know did *not* belong to the young lady) might have been left in the woods?'

'It wouldn't have been by night. I would be patrollin' or if so be as I was a-bed, well, I sleeps very light and it would a-woke me. I reckon it must have been in daylight. Motors and tradesmen's vans, and all that, comes up through the gates frequent, so I shouldn't have tooke no heed to a motorbike, not in daylight hours I shouldn't.'

'All right, I'll talk to you again later on.'

Mowbray returned to the Holdy Bay police station puzzled and dissatisfied. He could think of no reason why Stickle and Stour should have abandoned their means of transport, or why, having done so, they had chosen to disappear. The logical procedure, if they had intended to give up working for Tynant, was to have asked for any wages due to them after they had worked out their week's notice, and gone off on the motorcycle combination as usual, this time with no intention of returning. A possible explanation, which, although it persisted in his mind, he was unwilling to accept, was that one of them had killed the other and ditched the recognisable motorcycle combination before making a getaway. Like the two young men, he connected the vandalism with treasure-hunting, and what more likely, he was beginning to think, than that Stickle and Stour had been the vandals and had fallen out

with one another to the point of a fight to the death? He realised though, that, but for Veryan's death, this explanation would not have occurred to him.

Dame Beatrice and Laura arrived in Holdy village soon after three and parked the car where the caravan had stood.

'Well!' said Laura, surveying the scene of devastation. 'You'd think the place had been blitzed!'

'Whoever the busy vandals were, they were in a very great hurry,' said Dame Beatrice.

There was nobody about except a massive policeman who walked down from the gatehouse to the car.

'Dame Beatrice, ma'am?' he asked politely. 'We got word that you might be expected.'

'Yes, I telephoned Detective-Superintendent Mowbray from the hotel where Mrs Gavin and I had lunch.'

'I have instructions to give you access to the ruins, ma'am. We are keeping them clear otherwise, except for Mr Tynant and Mr Saltergate. We don't even want the other members of their party tramping about until the two gentlemen can assess the amount of the damage and decide what's to be done.'

'I am no expert in these matters,' said Dame Beatrice, 'so a closer inspection probably will tell me no more than I can learn from where we are standing. However' – she walked up through the gatehouse and surveyed the scene at closer quarters – 'it looks as though earth has been shovelled into what was the great ditch which formed a segment of Mr Tynant's outer circle.'

'That's right, ma'am. The sides of the main trench have been kind of stove in and the soil dumped in the ditch.'

'So I can see. Do you know where I can find Mr Tynant?'

'Detective-Superintendent Mowbray asked me to tell you he would be in the lounge of the Barbican along with Mr Tynant and would wait there till you came, ma'am.'

'Splendid. Thank you, officer.'

‘Sounds as though Mowbray is keeping tabs on Tynant,’ said Laura, when they were in the car and heading for the Barbican. ‘Surely he can’t suspect him of making away with the two workmen?’

‘Did you notice that Mr Saltergate’s towers, two of them, had also been vandalised?’

‘Yes, I saw that, but only in a general sort of way. I mean, I wasn’t bothering whose work had suffered what damage, but merely getting a general impression.’

‘That rather destroys the theory that Saltergate was responsible for the damage, doesn’t it? I think it was the work of three men. One would have used a pick, and he could have worked quickly enough, I think, to keep two others busy with their shovels. Now for the Barbican.’

Laura drove in under the archway entrance to the hotel car park and she and Dame Beatrice went into the reception hall. Mowbray rose from an armchair near the door and greeted them.

‘We have just come from the castle,’ said Dame Beatrice. ‘The damage can hardly have been done by mice.’

‘Ma’am?’

‘I beg your pardon. The famous Bruce Bairnsfather cartoons of the 1914 war would have been long before your time. So you are looking for three men.’

‘Two, we thought, ma’am, those being Stickle and Stour.’

‘Three is more likely, but I do not insist upon that number. You told me, when I telephoned you at lunchtime, that you thought I might be of help. In what way? I intended to come merely because Bonamy Monkswood wrote to me.’

‘So I understand, ma’am, but there is a matter over which you can be a lot of help to us, if you will. The two youngest ladies, Miss Broadmayne and Miss Yateley, have been to me with a half-told story which I should like to check, but Miss Yateley turned very timid and, indeed, got herself into what I can only describe as ‘a state’. I think she

was almost dragged along to me by the other young lady and the interview turned into a horse-to-water episode which frustrated me and got the young lady herself into such a tizzy that I gave up questioning her. In the end she was repeating over and over again that she knew nothing, it was all her imagination, she had never meant any harm, Fiona was a traitor and a bully and a telltale, and so on and so forth, all very high-pitched and hysterical, until I told the other young lady to take her back to the cottage where they are now staying and put her to bed with a couple of aspirins.'

'Did Miss Broadmayne offer an explanation of Miss Yateley's outburst?'

'No. All she said was that Priscilla had something to tell me about Professor Veryan's death.'

'Oh, not about the wreckage of Mr Tynant's trenches?'

'No, ma'am, nor of the damage to the foundations of two of Mr Saltergate's bits of walling, that's to say two of what he calls his flanking-towers. Somebody has pickaxed their foundations.'

'So I could see. What is the present relationship between the two gentlemen?'

'Much improved, according to Mrs Saltergate and Dr Lochlure. Each has absolved the other of what Mr Hassocks - a lively young gentleman that, ma'am - referred to as "dirty work at the crossroads".'

'That must be very gratifying to Mrs Saltergate and Dr Lochlure. Well, where shall I find Miss Yateley? Where is this cottage which I understand the two girls share with the two young men?'

'I'll take you along, ma'am. If Mr Monkswood is hoping to see you, he'll be there.'

'Where did you meet the two girls and when?'

'At the police headquarters in Holdy Bay this morning. I heard about the damage to the trenches and walls from them. Mr Tynant phoned through while they were still with

me, but I had had the news already, although I did not tell him that.'

'From what I know of Miss Broadmayne - not very much, I admit - I find it a little strange that she should have laid herself open to being called harsh names by Miss Yateley.'

'I fancy Miss Broadmayne is anxious to be on the right side of the law as represented by me, ma'am. After we'd left that gamekeeper Goole, I gave the young lady a solemn warning that, if Goole had not blotted his copybook by what amounted to kidnapping her and locking her up, she could have found herself in court on a charge of poaching. She was cavorting about all among his pheasants, and at night, too.'

'Had she blacked her face? I believe that aggravates the offence, does it not?'

Mowbray laughed.

'What she blacked was Goole's eye,' he said. 'I'm having another word with him later on.'

Laura and Fiona swam; Dame Beatrice and Priscilla sat in deckchairs on the beach at Holdy Bay.

'Are you really Bonamy's godmother?' asked Priscilla.

'Well, I was present at his baptism,' said Dame Beatrice. 'Later on, I was able to delegate my responsibilities to his schoolmasters. Those long-suffering men made certain that he could get through the Catechism and recite the Ten Commandments and, in due course, they brought him before the bishop for Confirmation.'

'People accept an awful responsibility when they take it upon themselves to promise for the baby that he will renounce the devil and all his works. I suppose somebody promised it in my name when I was christened, but I don't think it has worked out very well,' said Priscilla.

'You mean you have murdered, stolen, lied in court and committed adultery?'

Priscilla said, 'You ought to have been a priest. They always make sin sound so silly. No, I haven't done those

things – I haven't enough courage – but I haven't escaped the sin of covetousness.'

'The sin which is apt to lead to all the others. I wonder why it is relegated to tenth place? It almost comes as an afterthought, one feels.'

'Did you get what you expected?' asked Laura when, having given the two girls tea, she and Dame Beatrice had watched them drive away from Holdy Bay to return to the cottage.

'Priscilla began with one confession and ended with another. Neither helps to advance the enquiry into Professor Veryan's death, so far as I can see. She confesses that she did not spend that weekend in London, but with her farmhouse friends, as she had arranged to do. Mr Mowbray, I fancy, will have no difficulty in confirming this.'

'It's the story she told at the beginning and then she changed it to this trip to London and all the balderdash she invented to bolster up the story. I suppose she, like the rest of them, got scared when the inquest was adjourned. What was the confession at the end, and what came between the two?'

'She repeated an account she had given previously to young Fiona—'

'A bit of a grampus when swimming, that one. Powerful, but untidy, and puffs and blows. Best on the butterfly, she informs me, and that, of course, is not the most effective stroke when one is breasting the waves. Sorry! I interrupted you.'

'It was worthwhile. Your summing-up was admirable. Fiona has puffed and blown upon poor Priscilla until she has blown her house down and then Mowbray sent her to me. I was about to tell you that Priscilla gave Fiona (and now me) a graphic account of how simple a matter it must have been to tumble Professor Veryan off the tower of the keep. Fiona urged her to confess that she had actually seen the murder committed.'

‘Good gracious me! And had she?’

‘She says not. One thing is as certain as anything can be, though: she may have seen murder committed, but she herself could not have committed it in the way she describes; she is far too light and frail to collect even an unsuspecting man’s legs from under him and heave him over into an abyss. Fiona might have done it, but not Priscilla.’

‘Do *you* think she saw it done?’

‘I shall not answer that. People have now lost any of the faith in psychologists they may ever have had. I think I shall take up stamp-collecting.’

‘But what about young Priscilla?’

‘Fiona insisted that she should open her heart. Priscilla, having given one version of the way in which she spent the weekend of Professor Veryan’s death, then changed it for a much less credible one and this, it appears, has lain heavily upon her conscience. She has had nightmares and has woken Fiona up more than once.’

‘But we know that poor little rabbit couldn’t have killed a six-foot man, not even a string-bean like Veryan.’

‘True, but we have to make allowance for nerves, imagination and a guilty conscience.’

‘A guilty conscience?’

‘Because she had told lies to the police.’

‘Oh, I see, but surely she realised that she was only in the same boat as everybody else? The whole boiling of them chopped and changed their alibis as soon as they knew the police suspected murder. They’ve all told lies.’

‘True, but perhaps their consciences are not so tender as hers or their dread of the police not so great.’

‘Do you really think she knows anything about Veryan’s death? Her reconstruction of it can’t be all imagination, can it?’

‘Oh, I think so. She has chosen an explanation of how murder could have been committed, but by a method

which, as I think we are agreed, she herself could not have used.'

'So what method did she use?'

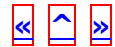
'You are leaping to conclusions. However, I myself will leap to one. I think Priscilla spent a domestic and blameless weekend and was no nearer Holdy Castle than her friends' farm on the night of Veryan's death, and that Mowbray knows it.'

This conclusion was justified. On the Sunday night Priscilla had been driven to Fiona's house by one of her friends, on the pretext of getting a lift back to the castle with Fiona. But, as there seemed to be no lights on in the house, Priscilla had returned to the car, and on the Monday morning her friends had found a note to say that she would not wait for breakfast and had borrowed the wife's bicycle to get back to Castle Holdy and rendezvous with Fiona.

'But she didn't leave the farm until six on the Monday morning, ma'am,' said Mowbray. 'The cowman saw her go. I reckon we can leave her out of our calculations.'

15

A Body in the Woods



But why on earth didn't the little silly stick to the truth she told in the first place? Why go to the lengths of inventing a weekend in London and getting drunk and joining a political march and all that rubbish?' asked Laura, reverting to the subject some time later.

'Oh, as it states in the hymn, because of "the very wounds that shame would hide". She has a great admiration for Dr Susannah and was beside herself to think of Fiona and the beloved object alone together for the weekend.'

'So you got her to tell you why she went to the house – which is, after all, further from Castle Holdy than her friends' farm – on that Sunday night?'

'Oh, no. *I* told *her* and then gave her the best advice I could.'

'Which was? – not that I'm trying to break the bond of secrecy between doctor and patient.'

'There is nothing secret about it. I told her that she should continue to write the obsession out of her system. She had shown me some poems. I commended them and suggested that the remedy is in her own hands. She replied that she saw herself as a most ineffective person, so I pointed out that, whereas a grand passion seldom lasts a lifetime, poetry can be immortal.'

'Is hers really any good?'

'She thinks it is and, at present, that is all that matters. The real wish of Priscilla's heart is not to captivate Dr

Susannah, but to see herself as the author of a slim volume. I encouraged her and promised to put her in touch with some helpful people when she has assembled an appropriate array of stanzas.'

'Does she really stand any chance of publication?'

'Oh, I have seen worse verses than hers in print. She is not afraid to experiment and, although at present it is not difficult to see whence she derives her images and ideas, she will find her own voice in time and I think she will have something pertinent to say. She has a poem which she calls 'Castle Holdy'. It shows a mature grasp of her own present state of mind. It goes:

*'When all our defences were down, the
bastions abandoned and broken;*

*When from shattered portcullis the word -
the word of surrender - was spoken,*

*Then, throwing away his long sword, the
emblem of battle and danger,*

*There stepped from the ranks of the foe a
courteous and soft-spoken stranger.*

*He asked neither captives nor gold; he set
no proud carillons pealing;*

*He gave us the choice of two gifts and
cunningly offered them, kneeling.*

*One was for peace, one for love, and easy it
was to confuse them.*

*His gifts were two-edged as his sword - but
we chose, for we dared not refuse them.*

'Anybody capable at Priscilla's age of analysing her own emotions as successfully as that is not entirely negligible.'

'You sat down and memorised the thing?'

'I read it twice. A combination of rhyme and rhythm, when both are conceived on simple lines, is readily assimilated. But to our more immediate concerns.'

'That phone call just now from Mowbray? He wouldn't say anything when I took it. He just asked me to put you on

if you were available. Is there something he wants us to do?’

‘Not at present. There is no reason why I should not tell you what was said. It was only that he wanted me to receive the news direct from him. It will all be public property by this evening.’

‘That must mean he has taken a step forward in the enquiry, I suppose.’

‘He does not appear to think so.’

‘Oh? Not a setback, I hope?’

‘He has received a report of a body found in the woods on the Holdy Castle estate.’

‘Any connection with that motorbike and sidecar?’

‘He has yet to get the body identified. He would not say more over the telephone.’

‘Bonamy and Tom did start something when they opted to dig for buried treasure, didn’t they? What’s the betting that this woodland corpse is that of one of the missing workmen?’

‘That is a certainty, I fear.’

This proved to be the case. At the inquest the body was identified formally as that of Stickle. Humus had been heaped over the corpse, but there had been no attempt at a more permanent burial. According to the forensic experts, the man had been dead since the time which coincided, more or less, with the vandalism at the castle.

‘Well, ma’am,’ said Mowbray, when he met Dame Beatrice after the inquest, ‘I would say that this man and his mate Stour had a bust-up, probably after getting drunk together, and that Stour did for Stickle. Wherever he was killed, the medico has no doubt about the method used. He died from a blow on the head from a pickaxe, probably while he was stooping down or kneeling. Well, my next job is to find Stour. They disappeared, so far as anybody can tell, at the same time or near enough. They did their

morning's work, pushed off and haven't been seen since, but I reckon they were responsible for wrecking the dig.'

'Has Mr Tynant found two workmen to take the place of these two?'

'Mr Tynant says he is packing up. The damage to his careful work has discouraged him. That, and Vryan's death, and now the murder of this workman, have convinced him that there's a jinx on the castle.'

'I can well understand his feelings. I doubt, though, that the death of Stickle was the result of a drunken quarrel,'

'I can't see much doubt about it,' said Laura. 'Couldn't it have been just that? – both of them in their cups and what began, most probably, as a mere argument developing into a bloody battle?'

'That does not correspond with the theory that the deceased was stooping down or kneeling when he was attacked,' said Dame Beatrice. 'There is no evidence to show *where* the murder was committed, I take it?' she said to Mowbray.

'Some dirt found in the wound – a very nasty one – is being analysed, but, of course, there's difficulty because of the woodland humus with which the body was covered. Some of that is bound to be mixed up with any other. I'm hoping the science boys will come up with something, because, if we can find out *where*, it could give us a clue to finding out *who*. On the face of it, it looks as though Stour and Stickle were almost certainly the vandals, but then there's this third man of yours, ma'am, though I don't know how you come to deduce him.'

'I will go further. I will suggest that there were at least four men, and possibly five, who wrecked Mr Tynant's work, and that they included Stickle and Stour. You remember, perhaps, a report from Tynant that the trench (not the ditch) had been deepened overnight and then the earth replaced in an attempt to hide what had been done? I think that was the work of Stickle and Stour. They had

heard the stories about buried treasure and were looking for it, but were not prepared to do any damage until the real vandals came along. As to who actually murdered Stickle, I keep an open mind. It is as likely as not to have been Stour, I suppose, and it need not have been at the castle, although there is plenty of dust and rubble there to hide any bloodstains.'

'Exactly, ma'am. As you probably know, Mr Tynant's pick and shovels have been kept in the keep and that's where we found them. There are no fingerprints on the pick and no bloodstains that anybody can see, but none of that was gone into at the inquest. We've asked for an adjournment, as everybody expected.'

'No fingerprints and no bloodstains once again hardly indicates that the murder was the result of a drunken quarrel,' said Dame Beatrice, 'but, of course, another pick may have been used.'

'Exactly, ma'am. You will recollect, though, that there were no fingerprints on Professor Veryan's telescope either.'

'Anyway, the presence of the motorcycle combination in Goole's woods may be accounted for,' said Laura. 'The sidecar could have been used to transport the body, and that doesn't sound much like a drunk, either. It's too calculated and opportunist, I would think. Anyway, where was the bike that it came to be so handy for the murderer's purpose if he wasn't Stour? He *must* have been Stour.'

'I know, Mrs Gavin. I wish I'd had some acquaintance with the two fellows beyond just the routine questions everybody was asked following Professor Veryan's death.'

'I would still like to know why two men living at a distance were preferred to two men who live actually in Holdy village,' said Dame Beatrice. 'I think I will make it my business to find out. Probably it was a question of thews and sinews, or superior skill in using the tools provided. The point is probably of no importance unless the village

men took umbrage and seized an opportunity of liquidating Stickle, but it seems most unlikely.'

'I hope it didn't happen like that, I'm sure, ma'am, because, if it did, the next body to turn up could be that of Stour. As it is, I shall have to do a house-to-house enquiry in the village and then round up all the chaps who were staying at the hostel the last few weeks. There may have been trouble there. The bike and sidecar turning up in those woods is very mysterious unless Stickle was murdered either on the vandalised site or at the hostel and then brought to the woods by night.'

'But why bring the body to the woods when it would have been far less dangerous to have dumped it somewhere on the heath or even on one of the beaches?' said Laura. 'Besides, would men coming from the hostel have thought of woods on the estate? I doubt whether itinerants like these hostellers would have known about the woods, or even of the existence of the estate itself, come to that. Those grounds and the house are a good way out of the village.'

'You may have something there, Mrs Gavin. Well, thanks to Dame Beatrice's handling of little Miss Yateley, I can leave that young lady out of my calculations with respect to Veryan's death, not that she was ever seriously in my mind. Miss Broadmayne, too, thanks to that cloth-head Goole, is also out of it, but I can't eliminate the two young chaps Monkswood and Hassocks, I'm afraid, and there is nothing, so far, to exonerate the Saltergates and Tynant. Even Dr Lochlure will have to remain on the list, although I really can't visualise her tipping a man off a tower. So far as motive is concerned, my mind hasn't changed. Saltergate had had some pretty hot exchanges with Veryan, and Tynant was his partner and may have been his rival. As for the young men, I don't think malice would have entered into it, but I still think of horseplay, or else that Veryan made some commotion on top of the tower which disturbed

them. I can see them going aloft to see what was happening, grappling with Veryan before they realised who he was, and then, with the broken coping and all the rest of it, sending him over the edge without the slightest intention of doing so.'

'Well, I certainly do not think they had any previous knowledge that he was interested in astronomy,' said Dame Beatrice. 'I wish they could produce an alibi for the Sunday night, although I do not believe for an instant that they were in the keep when Professor Veryan was killed.'

'Of course, there remain the two workmen,' said Laura. 'Who is to say that, instead of two men, Veryan and another, on the tower that night, there were not three? Suppose Stickle and Stour had a grievance against the boss of the outfit over pay or conditions or all the other things the so-called workforce is always beefing about? One or both of them fling Veryan off the tower and then find out that they've killed him and, later on, fall out between themselves and Stour does for Stickle in case he should grass?'

'It's plausible, Mrs Gavin.'

'Besides, they had got wind of the Castle Holdy treasure and thought Veryan's dig was being carried out to find it. I'm certain about that. It would account for everything.'

'The treasure is only an old wives' tale, ma'am. It's about as credible as the belief that the bones dug up at Glastonbury were those of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere. I'm a Somerset man myself and was told the story at school, but who's to tell one skeleton from another, except to distinguish a male from a female?'

'Would you be prepared to detail a couple of young constables to clear that deep ditch which, until it was filled in by whoever did fill it in, formed part of the defences between the outer and the middle bailey?'

'I could do that, yes, ma'am. Any particular reason?'

‘Call it a whim of mine. You see, to fill in that ditch was the only bit of really tidy work the marauders did, so I cannot help feeling that there must have been some special reason for it. What do you think?’

‘Only that they began with tidy minds and then went berserk, ma’am.’

‘You are probably right.’

‘I’ll get it cleared,’ said Mowbray firmly. ‘A nod is as good as a wink, they say.’

‘But only to a blind horse, and, so far as I know, your eyesight is excellent.’

‘So now what?’ asked Laura, when they had parted from Mowbray.

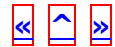
‘Nothing, so far as we are concerned, until that ditch is cleared and some more tidying-up done. Oh, I think we had better extend our booking at the hotel. I should like to be in at the death, so to speak.’

‘I know what you’re thinking, and so does Mowbray, I fancy, but would the murderer have been such a fool?’

‘He is not altogether a fool. While he can persuade the police that Stour murdered Stickle he is safe. He probably guesses that the work on Castle Holdy is going to be abandoned because of the damage and no doubt he has planned to be far enough away by the time the site is tidied up later on. I do not expect Tynant will ever come back, but I think the Saltergates will continue the work of restoring the castle defences, especially once that ditch of theirs is cleared, and Mowbray has promised to do that and I hope he will do it discreetly and without loss of time.’

16

Secondary Burial



We get Geordies, Irishmen and ex-miners from South Wales,’ said the warden of the working-men’s hostel in answer to a question from Mowbray. ‘Down and outs? Oh, no, we don’t cater for them. Lodging and food are as cheap as we can make them, but they’ve got to be paid for. Yes, we rank as a charity and are non-profit-making, but there’s all the upkeep. Stickle and Stour? They were uncle and nephew-by-marriage. If you’re looking for Stour as Stickle’s killer I think you’re barking up the wrong tree. A more harmless fellow I never knew. They came down here together looking for work because there’s a lot of unemployment up north. I’ve had them since early June. They hitch-hiked down here and have never given the slightest trouble. Got on with the other men as well as with each other. Used to get a bit boozed up on Friday nights when they’d been paid, but never turned awkward. Just used to turn in and sleep it off.’

‘Did you ever hear them talking about the work at Holdy Castle?’

‘They told me they would have liked whole days there instead of mornings only, so I got them some local gardening jobs to do – mowing lawns, clipping hedges, putting down weedkiller, that sort of thing – because I could thoroughly recommend them. There were never any complaints about them and I didn’t expect any.’

‘Is there a time limit for men to stay at the hostel?’

‘There’s supposed to be, so that we can help as many as possible, but the turnover is pretty brisk, so, if I get quiet chaps who genuinely can’t find regular work and somewhere to live, I bend the rules. I would have done it for these two when they had used up their three months, if they had wanted to stay on for a bit. I was amazed and disappointed when they cut their stick without notice, but, of course, what you tell me puts a very different complexion on that. Wasn’t somebody else killed who was working at Holdy Castle? If I were you, I’d look for a dead Stour, not a live one. There has been some funny talk going around about digging for buried treasure, and once people get wind of that sort of thing there is no telling where it will lead them.’

‘When did you realise that these two men were missing?’

The warden replied that it had been when they did not appear at breakfast the morning after the vandalism at the castle. The hostel was a small one and only fifteen men, with three men to each dormitory, could be accommodated at any one time. No tabs were kept on the men, but any bad behaviour was visited with expulsion from the hostel. Lock-up was at eleven-thirty and it was anticipated that, if anybody was not in by that time, either one of his room-mates would report it or, as had happened now and again, somebody would have arranged to leave a downstairs window open, although this was strictly against the rules. The warden himself was responsible for making certain that the building was secure, but there was nothing to stop a room-mate slipping downstairs after the last rounds had been made and opening a convenient window.

‘Of course, it’s only the younger fellows who would do that sort of thing for one another,’ the warden explained. ‘The undergraduate mentality, I call it. I turn a blind eye when I can. After all, they are paying guests, not prisoners.’

Mowbray wanted to talk with the third man who had shared the dormitory with Stickle and Stour, but the

conversation came to nothing. He was on shift work, he explained, and had been on night duty at the time in question, so had no idea that the other two were also out all night. The last he had seen of them was at hostel supper. When they went out after that, he assumed that they were going to the pub. Nobody else in the hostel had any contribution to make. Most of the men were builders' labourers and, having done a day's work and then sunk a jar or two at the local after the seven o'clock hostel supper, were only too ready to turn in.

'Who runs your organisation?' Mowbray asked the warden. 'I mean, who are your sponsors and who pays your salary?'

It appeared that the venture was an ecumenical one sponsored by the local churches and was supposed to be self-supporting. The warden's own salary was paid monthly by the committee treasurer and the accounts of the hostel were audited every six months. The hostel had been established when unemployment elsewhere had brought men south in search of jobs. The majority were young and unmarried. Stickle was a widower and was one of the few older men who used the hostel as a temporary base.

'Well,' said Mowbray to Detective-Sergeant Harrow, as they left the hostel, 'nobody wasn't sayin' nuffink to us, but I bet there are plenty of rumours flying around among those chaps. The warden can think what he likes, but my bet is that those two men sneaked back to the castle at night as soon as they knew that the caravan had been moved away from the site, got busy with pick and shovel to look for this supposed treasure and are responsible for all that damage to the trenches. Then I reckon they had a row. Stour, the younger man, was using the pick and in the heat of the moment he settled the argument while Stickle was grubbing in the loose soil with his hands. There was plenty of dirt under his fingernails when we found the body.'

‘We’ve no clue that they damaged those trenches or that Stickle was killed at the castle, sir.’

‘I know, and that brings me back to my main stumbling-block. Why choose the manor woods for the body and the motorbike? Still, I’ve got to start somewhere. We shall never get any further with Veryan’s death. The only thing we’ve got is the absence of fingerprints on that telescope. With Stickle we’ve got an undisputed case of murder, and it will be very hard if we can’t get somewhere with that.’

‘If it means house-to-house enquiries, it’s going to need all the men we’ve got, sir.’

‘I know, because we shall have to go further afield than Holdy village. Dame Beatrice wants a couple of men on the site to help with restoring those damaged trenches and the Chief Constable has told me that I must let her have them, however little I can spare them. From what that warden said, I have a hunch that I know why she wants policemen present. If he’s right, and Stour’s body turns up, we’re back to square one.’

‘Thanks for the loan of the car,’ said Fiona, handing back its keys to Tom.

‘*Hire* of the car,’ he said. ‘I was the gainer. Besides, it was much better to keep it moving, rather than let it stand idle for weeks.’

‘What are you going to do now?’

‘Offer our services to Dame Beatrice. We see ourselves as amateur sleuths.’

‘It’s pretty horrible to think I might have been in those woods with a dead body.’

‘But you weren’t. The body was put there days after that weekend when we all downed tools. What are you two going to do with the rest of the vac?’

‘We offered Nicholas our help with clearing up his trenches, but he said it will be a job for navvies because he is opting out. His work is ruined, he says. Priscilla is going to keep me company while my parents are away and

Nicholas said he would let us know if there is anything we can do for him later on, but I'm sure he doesn't want us on another dig.'

'And Dr Lochlure?' asked Tom. Fiona spread out her hands and shrugged her shoulders.

'That's French for "I don't know and I couldn't care less",' she said.

'She will be with Tynant,' said Priscilla, 'and they will go to the garden of the Hesperides.'

'And I shall eat little green apples,' said Tom.

'Poor Tom's a-cold,' said Priscilla.

'He needn't be. She has finished with Tynant,' said Fiona. 'I saw them together. He was dead white and she had a bright red spot on either cheek and I heard her say, "You can't publish your beastly book now that Malpas is dead." He said, "Of course I can. False conclusions ought to be challenged, whether the author is dead or alive." They went off together in Tynant's car, but I think he was only giving her a lift.'

'I think he is right to insist on publication,' said Priscilla. 'It is quite wrong to let sentiment hold up progress. I wonder what the book is about?'

'If you two are going to Fiona's home,' said Bonamy, 'you had better let us take you there, unless you've fixed up some other form of transport.'

'We were going to ask the Saltergates. They have decided to go now, but may return later and see what can be done about those foundations that got damaged when the site was vandalised,' said Fiona. 'Anyway, thanks for your offer. We'll be glad of it, and they'll be glad not to be taken out of their way.'

'Will your gear need both cars?'

'Oh, no, it's only suitcases.'

'I shall be thankful to get away from this place,' said Priscilla. 'We've worked like slaves, then all this wretched business with the police after Professor Veryan died, and

having to tell all those lies because we were scared and confused, and now one of the workmen has murdered the other one and a lot of the careful work that we've all sweated over has been destroyed—'

'Oh, not destroyed; only badly messed up. It can be put right,' said Bonamy. 'Whoever did it hadn't got time to do any permanent damage. Once people have got over their anger and disappointment, we'll all be back.'

'One thing,' said Fiona, 'at last we are off the hook. I suppose even the police don't believe there can be *two* murderers in a place this size. Whoever killed this workman must have killed Veryan, if anyone did. We've never been told why the police were so suspicious about his death. I still don't see why it couldn't have been an accident.'

'Well, we had better be moving,' said Bonamy, 'if we're going to drop these girls at Fiona's place before we join my godmother at Holdy Bay. I can't think why she has decided to stay there again, but I shouldn't think it would be for long.'

Mowbray, under pressure from the Chief Constable, had furnished two young policemen to assist in clearing the ditch. The pickaxe, as the suspected murder weapon, had been impounded, but in any case it was not required for the task in hand. That, as Bonamy observed, involved a mere job of shovelling, so two extra shovels and a spade had been purchased in Holdy Bay. Supervised by Dame Beatrice, the constables began work and Bonamy, Tom and Laura (who had insisted upon joining in) were also toiling away as soon as the coast was clear.

Dame Beatrice directed operations. The policemen, in shirtsleeves and with their official headgear discarded, were told to clear one end of the defensive ditch. Laura worked with the spade to remove debris from around Saltergate's fortifications and the two young men were

bidden to begin clearing the other end of the defensive ditch and work towards the two policemen.

The operation was barely half-an-hour old when a delivery van stopped beside the grass verge below the gatehouse and put out a couple of wheelbarrows which Dame Beatrice had ordered. With the aid of these the work went forward expeditiously until Dame Beatrice called a halt for refreshments.

The very dry soil was light and easy to shift and soon after the break the two policemen, who, like Tom and Bonamy, had taken turns with the shovels and the wheelbarrows, announced that they were 'getting down to the hard ground, ma'am, at the bottom of the old ditch'.

At this, Dame Beatrice ordered that the wheelbarrows should be abandoned and all four workers were to finish the clearance by dumping the loose earth and spending no more time taking it to shore up Tynant's outer circle. Laura came over and joined in, but, rather to Dame Beatrice's relief, it was not she, but the two policemen, who discovered Stour's body.

This happened about twenty minutes after they had announced that they had cleared their end of the ditch. Dame Beatrice had inspected it and had shaken her head. They had made a wonderfully clean job and the grass and weeds which had been growing on the sides of the ditch before the vandalism had taken place were obviously undisturbed. She pointed this out and added that for the rest of the time a sharp lookout must be kept and a report made if there was any indication that what had been the bottom of the ditch showed any signs of having been dug over.

The policemen had advanced only about a yard into Bonamy's half when one of them gave a shout. Dame Beatrice looked down into the ditch and said, 'Go carefully, please, with the pickaxe. I think this is it.' She then called upon Laura to surrender her spade and sent her off to the

village to telephone the police station at Holdy Bay. This served the double purpose of getting Mowbray to the castle as soon as possible and of getting Laura herself out of the way when the body was found. By the time Mowbray, Detective-Sergeant Harrow and the police surgeon, accompanied by a photographer and a fingerprint man arrived, the body, left exactly as it had been found, was lying exposed in the bottom of the ditch, a look of surprised expostulation on its grime-streaked face and with a horrid, suffused, black and purple bruise all down one side of the head.

There was no need for the doctor to give this as the cause of death. 'Swung round when he heard something behind him, and walked slap into a heavy spade, I think,' he said cheerfully. 'Didn't even have time to be frightened. Dead quite a day or two. Can't tell you any more until we get him along for a post mortem.'

'I bet he heard Stickle being struck and killed,' said Mowbray, when the body had been photographed and removed. 'Swung round to see what was happening and got the devil of a slosh. Chap who did it must have been a powerful fellow. The bones of the head are like jelly under that badly discoloured skin. Whoever did it meant to kill him all right. You can take him away. There's nothing more I can do here.'

'It was Stour,' said Tom.

'Lets him out,' said Mowbray. 'He could have pickaxed Stickle, but he couldn't have done that to his own head. What made you think of a body in the ditch, ma'am?'

'I thought there must have been a reason for dumping all that soil in it, since the rest of the dig was so untidy. It seemed to me that the soil in the ditch could have been put there to hide something. Where the murderer made his mistake was in not realising that the digging up of the weeds and grass in the bottom of the ditch, which he had to do in order to bury the body, must necessarily arouse

suspicion in the mind of anybody who had seen the ditch in its original state.'

'I reckon he's far enough away by now, ma'am. Most likely been keeping an eye on the operations and knows the second body has been found. The murders must have taken place within seconds of one another, I should think. I wonder whether Stickle and Stour were working with their murderers – were employed by them, I mean.'

'It is possible. Undoubtedly, before the site was vandalised, careful digging had been done at night.'

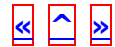
'Well, I hardly suspect either Tynant or Saltergate of killing their workmen with a pickaxe and a spade, and yet somebody knew of those woods and saw the possibilities of the sidecar, and that brings us back to Saltergate and Tynant again. Both of them had been up to the manor to argue the rights and wrongs about priorities at the castle ruins, which means they would have driven past the woods on their way up to the house, and Tynant knew that Stickle and Stour came to work on a motorbike and sidecar.'

'What do you propose to do now?'

'Continue our house-to-house enquiries. I can't arrest Saltergate or Tynant, or both, on the very little we've got at present. You thought from the beginning that there was a purpose beyond that of sheer destruction behind the vandalism, didn't you?'

17

Ways and Means



I 've been looking at the map,' said Laura, 'and I'd like to take a walk tonight.'

'Not alone, I trust, in these uncertain times.'

Laura looked at her curiously.

'It isn't like you to play the old hen with one chick,' she said. 'What's the big idea?'

'Only that three violent deaths have occurred very recently in this vicinity and that you and I are known to be interested in them.'

'Oh, I see. You think somebody may be keeping an eye on us?'

'You are, perhaps, not the only person who has been looking at maps.'

'That's what I thought. Tell you what, then, to solve two problems, yours and mine, suppose I get young Tom Hassocks to come with me? I can stay the night at the other end because there are spare beds in the cottage and in the morning the boys can bring me back in Bonamy's car.'

'Does the walk need to be taken at night?'

'Yes, I think so. The time factor is all-important and progress by night is likely to be slower than in daylight.'

'I concede that. Show me the route you propose to take.'

Laura unfolded the Ordnance map and, when she had indicated the path by which she proposed to travel, she drove over to the cottage in which Tom and Bonamy were still staying and, having given Bonamy his instructions, she drove back to Holdy Bay with Tom beside her.

At the hotel they gave Tom dinner and at half-past eleven he and Laura drove a short distance out of the town, halted for five minutes and then went to the all-night garage. Here she arranged to have the car checked and to pick it up in the morning at about lunchtime, then she and Tom set out.

The first stage of their journey took them to a railway bridge. The branch line was out of use and had been so for many years. They climbed a fence and scrambled down the bank. Alongside the rails it was comparatively easy walking. The line followed a valley between hills. After about forty minutes they climbed the bank at a point where Laura thought that the railway would no longer serve them, and came on to moorland. Soon they found the footpath she expected. It crossed the heath in more or less a straight line for about two miles and was undulating but nowhere was it overgrown. The luminous summer night made it easy enough to follow the way and, in single file, they made good progress.

Then glimmering silver birches appeared like tall ghosts among the heather, the path began to climb and then it passed through an eerie pinewood full of whisperings.

'I'm quite glad I didn't come alone,' said Laura; but the pines soon thinned out and after a time the path ended at a stile. The two walkers climbed this and found themselves in the main street of Holdy village. 'Better step it out now,' said Laura, as they heard the sound of the little waterfall, 'because we shall have to slow up to pick our way through all that mess the vandals have made between the gatehouse and the keep, and that may make a difference to the time we take.'

'*I'll* climb that newel stair, not you,' said Tom. 'How long do I stay at the top?'

'I have something to tell you,' said Nicholas, looking, chiefly because of the elf-lock, much like Richard Coaker in

The Farmer's Wife, and also like a more handsome Lewis Dodd.

'And time, too,' said Dame Beatrice. 'It is *more* than time, in fact, that that unfortunate business was cleared out of the way. Then, perhaps, we can get down to the other murders.'

'You know what I have to tell you?'

'I imagine so, but pray ease your bosom of the perilous stuff which troubles you.'

'It was I who wiped the fingerprints off Veryan's telescope.'

'Well, it had to be either you or the murderer, unless you and he are the same person.'

'You did suspect me, then?'

'Oh, yes, of course, especially when it came to my notice that Professor Veryan was attracted to Dr Lochlure.'

'I did not worry about that, I assure you, and of course I knew that Susannah had been on the tower with him to look at the stars. How did you know that it was I who wiped the telescope?'

'Because you were the person who found the body. I was told that when Professor Veryan was not at breakfast on that Monday morning and that he had not been to bed all night, you went straight to the castle. Nobody else seems to have been there until the police arrived.'

'I always thought that the broken parapet was dangerous, especially in the dark, so I feared he had met with an accident.'

'I should be interested to know why you wiped the telescope. Did you think you were protecting Dr Lochlure?'

'Not in the way you mean. For one thing, I knew she couldn't have been on the tower with Veryan on that particular night. She was tucked up in bed in the hotel at Holdy Bay. My idea, when I cleaned up the telescope, was to make sure her prints were no longer on it after the last time she was on the tower. I didn't want tongues wagging

about her being up there at night alone with Veryan. It was nothing to do with his death.'

'But if he had not been killed, you would never have thought about fingerprints.'

'Of course I shouldn't, but once the police had been told of the death and there had been the questioning and the inquest and its adjournment—'

'But you wiped the telescope *before* the police were called. You must have done.'

'Yes, but it was I who called them and I knew there would have to be an inquiry. There always is in such cases. The death was quite unexpected and had to be accounted for, and I wasn't going to have Susannah's name mentioned, even though she couldn't possibly be connected with it.'

'Why have you decided, after all this time, to confide in me?'

'You yourself have answered that question. Now that these other murders have taken place, it was time Veryan's death was – well, not forgotten, but cleared out of the way.'

'You thought very quickly about fingerprints when you found the body.'

'I thought quickly about Susannah.'

'Ah, yes, of course.'

'I have a feeling that you don't altogether believe me.'

'My dear Mr Tynant, how very perceptive you are!'

'Why don't you?' He asked the question without heat, but in a detached, academic manner. 'Surely, now that two *real* murders have been committed, we can write off poor Veryan's death as the accident it undoubtedly was?'

'You still have to account for one or two small matters.'

'If you mean why didn't I stay at Holdy Bay, as Susannah did, when my car broke down, I've already explained that. We thought it better not to come back together on the Monday morning. After all, she was supposed to have spent the weekend in Fiona Broadmayne's home, not with me.'

‘So you walked all the way back from Holdy Bay and ended up exhausted at the Barbican—’

‘Much too late to have killed Veryan. I refer you to the medical evidence given at the inquest.’

‘My secretary tells me that Holdy Castle is surprisingly close to Holdy Bay as the crow flies.’

‘I’m not a crow. By road, the way I had to come, it’s all of twelve miles. My car broke down soon after eleven-thirty. I left it and escorted Susannah back to the hotel, then I went to the all-night garage to get them to tow the car to their repair shop and see to it first thing in the morning, then I foot-slogged it all the way back to the Barbican and sat there until the outdoor staff arrived and then I went in with them. The police checked that my car was at Holdy Bay all Sunday night and wasn’t returned to me until Monday afternoon, by which time Veryan had been dead for at least twelve hours and possibly longer.’

‘Yes, it is a good story, but there is something I ought to add to it. I agree that it is at least twelve miles by road—’

‘And even I, fit though I am, am not a marathon runner. I do not even manage four miles an hour on average over such a distance.’

‘I am a competent reader of Ordnance maps, Mr Tynant.’

‘Meaning what, Dame Beatrice?’

‘The railway line to Holdy Bay has not been in use for some years. By following the track for a couple of miles and then taking footpaths, the distance to be covered between Holdy Bay and Castle Holdy is less than five miles and the footpaths are well maintained for the benefit of holiday-makers. I *think* you could have managed to get back to the castle in time to push Professor Veryan off the tower before he had finished his star-gazing, and he would have been entirely unsuspecting of you. I also suggest that, when you had had a friendly little talk, he handed you the telescope and invited you to look at the night sky. It was your own

prints that you wiped off, not those of Dr Lochlure, was it not?’

‘But you can’t prove any of this. Besides, why should I want to kill Veryan?’

‘There were two reasons, Mr Tynant, and both of us know both of them.’

‘We shall never get a conviction, ma’am,’ said Mowbray. ‘He’s quite willing to admit he wiped the telescope clean, but he’s sticking to the reason he first gave you. For his own sake he’s now willing to have Dr Lochlure’s name mentioned in court. Our problem is that nobody can say there was any *outward* sign of bad blood between him and Veryan and, even if there had been, the boot would have been on the other foot, from what he told me when I arrested him. He’s got a book due to be published which, he claims, demolishes some pet theories held by Professor Veryan.’

‘I doubt whether Professor Veryan knew of this book, but whether or not he did hardly matters now. As for the reason Tynant gave for cleaning the telescope, it was incredible to the point of being ridiculous. Nevertheless, he is not our man.’

‘But you agreed to the arrest, ma’am.’

‘Yes. The news of it may reassure the murderer of Stickle and Stour.’

‘Well, Dr Lochlure certainly wasn’t up on the tower on the night of Veryan’s death, ma’am. Naturally I re-checked at that Holdy Bay hotel when I’d heard what everybody had to say, and not only do they remember that Dr Lochlure came back there, but they had a false alarm of fire at half-past two in the morning and Dr Lochlure was there all right, calming an old lady who was trying to have hysterics.’

‘Mr Tynant will not be convicted and perhaps he will be of some use while he is in custody. One never knows. It was my reason, as I said, for his arrest.’

‘Of course there is still Saltergate to be considered, ma’am, I suppose. He’s the one, according to all I hear, that Veryan was having a fight with. We can’t altogether ignore that.’

‘It may, like Tynant’s arrest, prove to be a valuable red herring, I suppose.’

‘Meanwhile, there are two more murders to settle, ma’am. It seemed simple at first, when we found Stickle’s body in those woods, but now we know the fellow we thought must be the murderer has been murdered, too, it’s altered everything.

That destruction of the trenches no longer looks like what it seemed at first. Whoever killed Stour had to find somewhere to hide the body to make things look to us as at first they did look.’

‘That Stour had killed his uncle—’

‘And had done a bunk. I don’t see what else there was to think at the time. It seemed so obvious. Anyway, you didn’t lose any time in getting that ditch cleared.’

‘Going back to Mr Tynant for a moment, there was never any need for him to have cleaned the fingerprints off the telescope. It was the act of a man with a guilty conscience.’

‘Makes me wonder why he did it, though, let alone why he confessed to it. Anyway, I had to arrest him.’

‘He did it in a panic. He confessed to it because he now realises, as we do, that he need not have done it at all. There was every chance that he had handled the telescope under completely innocent circumstances and so left his fingerprints on it.’

‘Well, I suppose Veryan could have shown it to him at some time, and then, of course, when he went to the castle on that Monday morning and found Veryan’s body, he could have picked up the telescope in all innocence, as you say. But if that was all, why not have told us? Why wipe his prints off it? Wasn’t that the action of a guilty man?’

‘Not of a guilty man, but of a man with a guilty conscience, as I said.’

‘What’s the difference, ma’am?’

‘Don’t you think that Tynant has often wished that Veryan was dead?’

‘As to that, I couldn’t say, but I shall never get him convicted, that I do know.’

‘Then let us turn our attention to the other matter, the deaths of the two workmen.’

‘There, again, Tynant comes into it, ma’am. He knew of those woods. Mr Saltergate told me that he, Veryan and Tynant (who was with Veryan in the car) had all been up to the manor house and to get to the house you have to take the road through the woods. I’ve checked all that. One thing I’m left wondering about, though, is that, after we found Stour’s body, you insisted on the fact being kept quiet and you also made my fellows shovel back all the soil and stuff into the ditch. Are you going on that old saying that the murderer always returns to the scene of the crime?’

‘No, not in the sense which is meant by that unlikely theory. I think that, so long as we all maintain silence, there is every chance that the guilty parties will see a necessity for removing Stour’s body from where they buried it and taking it to a safer place. They have no guarantee that, at some time in the near future, work will not be resumed at the castle and, although there may be nothing to connect them with the corpse, I think they will be anxious to move it before it is discovered. Let us make it public that the castle project has been abandoned and then keep watch. The apple, with any luck, should fall not, like Newton’s, on to your head, but right into your waiting hand.’

‘My mind still runs on Tynant and Saltergate, ma’am. As I said, they both knew those woods.’

‘But there were those who knew the woods better than any stranger could do.’

‘Could bring us to that sleazy gamekeeper Goole, I suppose, but I don’t see him as a murderer. Of course, he could have been an accomplice. Even so, two – say him and Saltergate, or even him and Tynant – would have had a bit of a problem against two tough fellows like Stickle and Stour.’

‘Not if Stickle and Stour were partners with the murderers and then, having served their turn, were inconveniences which had to be got out of the way.’

‘Out of whose way? You give me the impression that you could name names, ma’am.’

‘Laura was wrong,’ said Dame Beatrice reminiscently. ‘She said that, when the public was warned off the site because scientific work was in progress, the general opinion would be either that the scientists were prospecting for oil or that something to do with nuclear fission was being planned. The plain truth is, as I repeat, that the local people saw Saltergate’s clearing-up operations and Veryan’s trenches as a search for the Royalist treasure which was rumoured to be buried somewhere in the castle precincts. What else were people to think when, knowing the legend, they saw stone and other debris being removed, three wells uncovered and partly cleared, and a great gash of a trench being dug and pegs put in to indicate that further excavation was planned?’

‘You made the point before, yes, ma’am. So you still believe some mastermind saw a way of getting a lot of the digging-up done for him and tried to cash in as soon as the caravan and the two cars had moved away to the village and he knew the coast was clear. But what could he expect to accomplish in one night?’

‘I will give you my theory for what it’s worth and then you may or may not act on it. I see it this way: there have always been rumours that treasure had been hidden somewhere in the castle or its grounds. Nobody seems to

have attempted to confirm them until now. The present owner either had not heard them or did not believe them and the villagers dared not test them on what was, after all, his property.

'Then, after he had gone away on holiday and installed his cousin as caretaker, along came the architects and archaeologists, and the rumours took a fresh lease of life and became current not only in Holdy village, but in the neighbourhood round about. I don't think they spread to any extent until the work was well under way and it became clear that neither an oil-rig nor a nuclear reactor was under contemplation, but, as the site began to be cleared, wells uncovered and the digging taking its ordered course, Stickle and Stour saw, as they thought, a golden chance of a rich reward for their labours.

'Like their murderers, they had to wait upon events. These were precipitated by the removal of the caravan and the cars and the disappearance of the young men from the keep.'

'Somebody made a big mistake when they left that bike and sidecar in those woods, ma'am. If Stour had really murdered Stickle, as we were meant to think, he'd have made his getaway on it. Mind you, though, I suppose he *could* have pickaxed Stickle if they'd had a row, and then got scuppered himself, but I don't think it's very likely. I think Stour was struck down because he'd seen his uncle Stickle murdered.'

'I agree. Somebody dared not leave Stour alive.'

'Well, because of the woods being used as a hiding-place, I'm going to have another go at Goole and see what he comes up with, though he'll go on swearing he knows nothing about the motorcycle or the body in the woods.'

As it happened, there was no need for Mowbray to lean any further on Goole. The wretched man turned up at the Holdy Bay police station and implored to be taken into custody.

'And if Mr Sandgate wants to bail me out,' he said, 'him knowin' I'm as innocent as the day, well, I don't want none of it. You lock me up good an' proper. That way I'll be safe, which is more'n I'll be if you leaves me on the loose.'

Taken to the interview room and given a seat at a table opposite Detective-Sergeant Harrow, he demanded to see Mowbray.

'You tell me what you've come about and *I'll* decide who you see and don't see,' said Harrow.

'I've come about murder, that's what I've come about, and, if Mr Mowbray don't listen to me and lock me away, there'll be another murder done and another body buried in them woods, and it'll be mine, and so I'm tellin' you.'

'Well?' said Mowbray, when Harrow had sent a constable to the Detective-Superintendent's office. 'Have you come with any useful information? I hope so, for your sake.'

'As to that, I could not say, sir. All I knows is as I never put no bike and sidecar in my woods, and I never buried no bodies, sir.'

'So why have you come here?'

'To proclaim of my innocence, as is my democratic right, sir.'

'If you're innocent there is no need to proclaim it. What *do* you know?'

'I knows as I goes in fear of me life, that's what I knows.'

'Why? Who would want to take *your* miserable life?'

'Not knowin', can't say, but I be in mortal fear of that man Wicklow, up to the big 'ouse.'

'Why?'

'I suspicions of him, sir. It was him as got me mixed up in all this at the first of it.'

'Oh, yes?'

'Bein' as he had drove Mr Sandgate a time or two to the castle to see 'ow the diggin' was gettin' on. I reckon as it were 'im what put that bike and sidecar in my woods to put

suspensions on me, like, us never 'avin' got along what you might call matey.'

'Are you accusing Wicklow of murder?'

'Oh, no, sir! Oh, dear me, no! If I knowed anything o' that nature, sir, I would be in dead trouble for not a-tellin' you, sir.'

'Well, what are you supposed to be telling me now?'

'Only as I knows nothink of no bodies nor of no motorbikes in my woods, sir.'

'That's as may be. Anyway, I'm going to charge and arrest you as an accessory after the fact. I don't think you have the guts for murder, so that won't come into it, but, if the judge finds you guilty as charged, you'll get ten years, I shouldn't wonder. You are not obliged to say anything when I charge you, but if you do...'

'And did he?' asked Dame Beatrice, when she heard Mowbray's report.

'Yes, indeed, ma'am. First he said, "Well, even if the judge *do* give me ten years - and I ain't proved guilty yet - at least I'll be alive at the end of 'em, and I'm much obliged to you, guv'nor, for lockin' of me up. You done me a favour and now I'll do you one. You get 'old of a dowser to go over them ruins."

'I told him three wells had been located already and there wasn't likely to be a fourth.'

' "I knows all them old stories, for all I'm not a native of these parts", he said, "and I knows as a dowser with the 'azel twig can find sommat bettern water. You take my tip, sir, and try a dowser with the 'azel rod."

'Well, I've been thanked occasionally, Dame Beatrice, for one thing and another, but I've never been thanked before for taking a man into custody and promising him ten years hard. I'm going to put a red ring round the date in my diary.'

'And what about the dowser?' asked Laura. 'Are you going to try to get hold of one?'

‘Not me, Mrs Gavin. All poppycock, except they can sometimes find water. I make you a present of Goole’s idea for what it’s worth, which, in my opinion, is absolutely nothing.’

‘Are you sure?’ asked Dame Beatrice. ‘Metal detectors have come under official disapproval but I myself used to manipulate a hazel twig.’

18

Lordly Dishes



We're still left with the death of Professor Veryan,' said Laura, when she and Dame Beatrice were alone together. 'If Mrs Veryan couldn't prove that she wasn't even on dry land when her husband died, I think Mowbray would have arrested her.'

'You think so?'

'Well, yes. She gains by the death.'

'Not so much, apparently, as if he had remained alive. She cannot touch the capital and the interest, I understand, is less than the alimony she has been receiving.'

'Do you think he would have changed his will in favour of Susannah Lochlure if he had lived?'

'We have no evidence that he intended anything of the kind.'

'Of course the magistrates will never commit Tynant for trial. Mowbray hasn't a thing against him except his slightly incredible alibi. He *could* have got back to the castle in time to shove Veryan off that tower, but only if he'd made that cross-country trip, as I did, and there's nothing whatever to prove that he didn't walk all the way by road, as he swears he did. We know there couldn't possibly be a committal on the present evidence. Why did you tell Mowbray to arrest him?'

'Because the only way we shall find out how Veryan came by his death is by getting a confession from the person most concerned in it.'

‘And why did you tell Mowbray not to go up to the manor house and tackle that man whom Goole seems so scared of?’

‘Because he would get nothing from the man and his master except stout denial. It would only be necessary for the master to back up the man, and Mowbray’s visit to them would be profitless. What he must do is to keep a nightly watch on the castle ruins, as I have suggested to him.’

‘Why? Do you expect the murderer to return to the scene of the crime? I thought you said that was an old-wives’ tale.’

‘Not in this case, I think. There is no doubt that Goole has guilty knowledge of some sort. Now that he is in custody and will be under pressure to tell what he knows, the onus is on the murderer to remove Stour’s body from the ditch where, so far as he knows, it still lies buried. With any good fortune, Mowbray should be able to catch the man when he comes along to dig it up with the expectation of transferring it to a safer place, a place unknown to Goole.’

‘It’s a long shot, though, isn’t it?’

‘If it falls short, Mowbray can then go up to the manor house and confront master and man. Meanwhile, do you remember getting out of the car on our first visit to the castle and finding me a spray of hazel nuts and leaves? Hie you thither again and bring back, if you can find one, a forked hazel twig for a divining rod. There was a time when I had some gift for rhabdomancy, as I claimed.’

Laura was about to depart on this errand when Mowbray called. He looked worried and dissatisfied.

‘Whether Tynant walked the roads or whether he took the short-cut across country hardly seems to matter, because we shall never prove which way he chose to come. My guess still is that he pushed Veryan off the tower and that his pretended anxiety about him, when the professor

didn't come down to breakfast and had not slept in his bed, was nothing more than an excuse to get along to the castle and wipe his own fingerprints off the telescope. What do you say to that, Dame Beatrice? Can you fault it?'

'I think Mr Tynant was genuinely anxious about Professor Veryan's safety. Everybody knew how dangerous the top of that tower was. I think the first thing Tynant found was the telescope. I think he picked it up from where it lay on the ground and then I think he saw Veryan's body lying on that heap of stones. He went over to it, ascertained that Veryan was dead and then panicked. He had every reason to know how much the death of his senior colleague would benefit him, and he knew also that the professor had been casting a more than fatherly eye on Dr Lochlure. Then, because of his unnecessarily quixotic action in leaving Dr Lochlure to come back alone to the caravan, he was left without an alibi from midnight onwards and to remove his fingerprints from the telescope seemed to him the logical thing to do.'

'But the fact that he and Dr Lochlure were both in his car when it broke down, ma'am, proves that, in the first place, he had had no intention of letting her come back alone.'

'Ah, but he expected to return her to the caravan when, if you remember, he fully believed it to be empty because of the weekend leave which the caravan party and the others had taken. To return her there under cover of the night could be done secretly. To bring her back on the Monday morning when, for all he knew, the two girls would have returned, was a different matter entirely. He seems to hold old-fashioned views about the necessity to protect a lady's good name.'

'But Miss Fiona knew they were together, ma'am. She knew that Dr Lochlure had telephoned Tynant to come and take her away from Fiona's home.'

‘Yes, and there was strong presumptive evidence that Dr Lochlure and Tynant spent the weekend together. I allow that. However, there would be no proof so long as Fiona was able to find Dr Lochlure in the caravan and alone on the Monday morning. It would not be difficult for Dr Lochlure to cook up a story about how she had spent the weekend, had she felt any inclination to offer explanations. I do not think she would have bothered, or that either Fiona or Priscilla would have been ill-natured enough to gossip.’

‘Tynant and Dr Lochlure would have been in for a bit of a shock if they *had* returned to the caravan overnight. They would have found those two girls Mr Hassocks and Mr Monkswood picked up,’ said Mowbray with a chuckle. ‘So you think Tynant panicked when he found Veryan’s body.’

‘And realised that he had imposed his own fingerprints on the telescope. There was no secret about his chance to step into Veryan’s shoes at the university, nor about the amount of Veryan’s money which would be freed for archaeological research if the professor died without changing his will.’

‘Then, if he didn’t push Veryan off the tower, who, in your opinion, did, ma’am?’

‘Well, there is somebody who ought to be allowed to clear herself, since she almost, but not quite, confessed earlier on that she—’

‘Not Mrs Saltergate, that nice motherly lady?’

‘She had her husband’s interests very much at heart, and there is no doubt that Veryan was spitefully determined to undermine Saltergate’s walls.’

‘Spitefully, ma’am?’

‘Oh, yes. From the beginning, there was no reason whatever to suppose that there would still be traces of a Bronze Age burial under one of those flanking-towers. A grave in such a place would have been utterly destroyed centuries ago. Veryan was incensed because Saltergate had

been given equal permission with himself to work at the castle, that is all.'

'These scholars, ma'am!'

'Some are giants, others are the pettiest of men, but that is a summary of character, not of attainment.'

'But the two young fellows also seem to have been given permission to root about in the castle grounds, yet neither of the other parties seems to have had any hard feelings towards them.'

'Ah, but they had been sensible enough to disarm both the major parties by helping with the reconstruction and also with the digging.'

'But Mrs Saltergate? I can't believe it, Dame Beatrice!'

'She will come forward, I am sure, now that you have arrested Tynant. I will also tell you the story *she* will tell you and I will prophesy further that you will never prove her to be a murderess. Accidental death will be her plea, and I do not see that you can do other than accept it, particularly as, from her point of view, it will be the truth. Do you remember her account of an expedition she and her husband made after nightfall to the castle?'

'Yes, but she said they went back to the hotel at about eleven-thirty and I've checked that. According to the doctors, Veryan was still alive at that time.'

'At that time, yes, but I have a theory that she paid a second visit to the castle that night. I suggest that you tell her she did, and ask her for an explanation.'

Summoned to the police station, Lilian was unperturbed and, seating herself in the chair provided, she stated that she would have come forward if the magistrates committed Tynant for trial.

'That would ruin his career,' she said, 'and would be the last thing I intended. Neither he nor I murdered Malpas, you know, Detective-Superintendent, although I suppose I was responsible, in a way, for the accident.'

'Yes, madam?'

‘Edward and I did go to the castle that night, but we were there looking at the extent of the excavation before Malpas arrived. Edward tackled him when he turned up and got a very dusty answer which made us both very angry, but after some hot words had been exchanged we returned to the hotel.’

‘Yes, I checked that, madam, but you both went back to the castle later, did you?’

‘Not Edward. I was so angry and restless when we went up to our room that I knew it was useless to think about going to bed. Edward retired as usual, but I said I was going on to the flat part of the roof to get some air, and that was all I intended to do when I said the words. My husband and I occupy separate beds, so I knew I should not disturb him when I came back to the room, for he is a very sound sleeper and soon drops off.

‘When I stepped out on to the leads I saw Malpas silhouetted against the night sky and it occurred to me that perhaps pleading with him to leave Edward’s walls untouched might prove more effective than anger, especially as I am a woman.’

‘You left the hotel by way of the fire escape, I suppose.’

‘Yes, I did. There are only two doors, both at the ends of corridors, on to the fire escape staircase, so I knew that nobody in the hotel would see me, and I was very quiet. Like many people of my build, I am very light on my feet.

‘It seemed a long way to the castle and my fear was that Malpas would have given up his star-gazing before I got to the keep, and to waylay him on his way to his hotel did not seem a very good idea, as his only thought would be to get to bed, not to stay on the road and listen to me.’

‘But you found that he was still on the tower.’

‘I had a torch, the one Edward had used when we were inspecting the trench, so I lighted my way into the keep. I knew, of course, that Bonamy and Tom would not be there,

so the coast would be clear. I made my way up that newel stair with great caution and—'

'I wonder Professor Veryan did not hear you. Even with the aid of an electric torch and however light on your feet you are, you must have made some sounds as you climbed up.'

'As to that, I cannot say. All I know is that when I reached the top of the tower Malpas had his telescope to his eye and his back towards me.'

'Could you see as much as that in the dark, madam?'

'Well, I had switched off my torch, but these summer nights are not really dark and on that particular night the sky was clear and luminous. I spoke his name, but he was absorbed in his star-gazing and answered vaguely, "Oh, it's you again, Lilian." So I spoke sharply. "Malpas," I said, "you must do as we wish and leave our work alone. It is intolerable of you to make plans to destroy it." He retorted that his work was of greater importance than ours. This made me very angry indeed and I used a weapon of which I am now ashamed, and which I am certain caused his death.'

'Dear me, madam,' said Mowbray, 'I hope you realise what you are telling us!'

'Of course I do. Dame Beatrice, I spoke to him of Susannah. She used to take walks at night, you know. Most of them were to meet Nicholas. Everybody, I suppose, soon knew about those, but the others were visits to Malpas on his tower. I do not claim that intimacy took place, although *Lady Chatterley's Lover* appears to indicate that it can take place anywhere and under the most uncomfortable circumstances, but meet they did. I had seen them from the hotel roof, as I had seen Malpas himself that evening. I threatened him, Superintendent. I pointed out that exposure would ruin Susannah's career and could also threaten his own. I gave him until the end of the following morning to make up his mind to give me a written pledge

that he would give up any interference with our work. I added that I was still in two minds whether I would not, in any case, inform against the two of them. It is my contention that, when I left him, the unfortunate man threw himself off the tower.'

'That is a very interesting theory, madam,' said Mowbray.

'Well, aren't you going to write it down and ask me to sign it? I suppose it is a confession of blackmail, isn't it? I threatened him, you know.'

'Thank you for your co-operation, but I hardly imagine we shall be troubling you further, Mrs Saltergate.'

'You mean I can go?'

'Certainly, madam. There is nothing, so far, on which I can charge you.'

'Well,' said Dame Beatrice, when, looking both relieved and deflated, Lilian had gone, 'they say that confession is good for the soul, but the mind is my province and I think she will be relieved to have got that particular confession off hers.'

'You don't see Professor Veryan as a suicide, ma'am?'

'It has been said in John Peer's Laws that suicide is the sincerest form of self-criticism and, from all I have heard of Professor Veryan, I doubt very much whether it would ever have occurred to him to criticise himself so adversely. I think Superintendent, that the truth, by this time, is plain to see, for it seems obvious to me that Sandgate and Wicklow, with or without assistance from Goole, murdered Stickle and Stour. I imagine that, if you question the wretched Goole, you will find that, although Sandgate had met none of the castle parties at that time, he knew all about the site and was already in association with Stickle and Stour and knew, as they did, all the stories about buried treasure.

'To begin with, he relied upon the two men only for information about the progress of the work and the

movements of the various parties. From them he learned that the whole site, so far as they knew, would be deserted on the night of Veryan's death. At that stage I think all he had decided to do was to take a look around the excavations and no more than that.

'What Stickle and Stour had not disclosed, because at so early a date they did not know of it, was that the castle, after all, was *not* entirely deserted. There, with his telescope, on top of the tower was Veryan. *They* could excavate for the treasure only at night, and *he* could study the heavens only at night. He had to be eliminated before they could search for the treasure themselves. The vandalism had to be done so thoroughly that, with any luck, the various parties would give up in despair and go home, leaving everything clear for the treasure-hunters.'

'So Sandgate or Wicklow, or both, murdered Veryan, you think, ma'am, but why Stickle and Stour?'

'Sandgate and Wicklow must have had some sort of row with Stickle and Stour. The two workmen then decided to give up their daytime work and concentrate on finding the treasure for themselves. On the evening Stickle and Stour were murdered, the other three had found the two navvies doing a little night-work on their own, once the castle and its environs were deserted when the young people moved into the cottage and Dr Lochlure to a hotel. There seemed every chance that the workmen might light upon the treasure first, and that could not be risked. Sandgate and Wicklow also felt they had been double-crossed.'

'Wouldn't Sandgate have noticed that a lot of extra digging had been done? On the other nights, I mean, when, presumably, he and Wicklow turned up at the usual time to do their own treasure-hunting?'

'No, because he did not know how much digging had been done legitimately under Tynant's supervision during the day. He did not care to appear on the site too often during the morning working hours, I fancy. He probably left

his car in the village and sent Goole ahead to reconnoitre. What caused the row with the navvies in the first place I do not know, but nothing makes a man so doubtful of his associates as a lust for wealth.'

'Well, it will be a big help if I can catch them in the act of trying to dig up a body which is no longer there.'

'I think so. Incidentally, I was interested in Goole's kindly suggestion to you. Laura knows where to procure a hazel twig.'

'Oh, you mean Goole and his dowser. You don't really think there's treasure buried in the castle grounds, do you?'

'Everybody else seems to think so, but if it is at the bottom of a well there is no way of telling whether the hazel twig is signalling water, precious metals, or both. May I ask whether you are keeping watch on the castle tonight?'

'All my plans are made, ma'am. Now that we've got Goole there's no time to be lost if you are right, and I feel sure you *are* right. Goole was mixed up in the business in some way, that's clear.'

'Are we in on the act?' asked Laura.

'I'd rather you weren't, Mrs Gavin. It may be a violent, messy sort of business. Gentlemen who use pickaxes and spades to despatch people who get in their way are not going to be too squeamish if it comes to a hand-to-hand fight with the police.'

'The hazel twig,' said Dame Beatrice, 'will, I hope, provide you with cleaner, better fun than the hand-to-hand fighting which Detective-Superintendent Mowbray predicts, my dear Laura.'

'I'd have liked a ringside seat, all the same,' said Laura. 'However, hazel twig, here I come!'

The police vigil was not a long one. As Dame Beatrice had predicted and Mowbray had accepted, the murderers were only too anxious to find another resting-place for the

second victim before the police had a chance to act on any information which Goole might have given them.

Mowbray had put a couple of men in the empty lodge with a fast car discreetly hidden among the trees. Their orders were to follow any vehicle which passed by the lodge, since there would be little doubt about who would be in it.

Mowbray himself, with Sergeant Harrow and four men in uniform, climbed the castle hill from the side nearest to the village. It was a steep scramble, but it avoided approaching the keep from the gatehouse where he had posted two more men with orders to remain hidden unless they were called into action. His own posse went under cover in the partially restored guard-tower at the entrance to the inner bailey. Here they could remain hidden from anybody who approached the ditch by the obvious route.

The action, when it came at close on midnight, was short, sharp and successful. Mowbray allowed the two men who had entered the outer bailey about a quarter of an hour of frenzied digging before he and his squad pounced on them.

'So what's all this, then?' he said, when, to nobody's surprise, Sandgate and his henchman Wicklow had been apprehended. At the station, confronted by Goole, Wicklow made a determined attempt to throttle him. Sandgate demanded to have his lawyer present before he replied to any charges.

'Goole will shop the other two,' said Mowbray confidently. 'My bet is that Wicklow used the pickaxe on Stickle and that Sandgate took the body to the woods in that sidecar. Goole, I reckon, was only co-opted to help with wrecking the place, but he'll tell us which of the other two slapped a spade against the side of Stour's head. My guess is Wicklow for both the murders.'

Over a discoloured patch which Laura, from the top of the keep, reported she could descry in the centre of

Veryan's circle, the hazel twig in Dame Beatrice's yellow claw bent and twisted like a live thing.

'That must be Veryan's primary grave,' said Tom. 'Can't be another well, can it? Let's play resurrectionists. I've always admired Burke and Hare.'

In the cist grave which he and Bonamy uncovered were the bones of a man who had been dead four thousand years, but in the angle between his pelvis and his knees, and mounting well above his grinning skull, were leather bags partially but not wholly perished by the passing of time. They contained a number of Renaissance and early Stuart gold rings and pendants, gold and silver hat-badges of Elizabethan date, a necklace of gold and pearls, a collection of gold coins, an Armada medal by Nicholas Hilliard, silver spoons and tankards, two covered cups, a small silver ewer, silver beakers, a silver-mounted drinking horn, a pair of silver candlesticks and a silver-mounted mazer.

Dame Beatrice surveyed the spoil and picked up a silver-gilt plate decorated with lapis lazuli.

' "She brought him butter in a lordly dish," ' she said.

'The coroner is going to have a rare gloat over this lot,' said Tom. 'There's bound to be a reward, I suppose. Shall we come in for anything, do you think?'

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